Anthology of Love

100

SHORT STORIES IN HONOUR OF

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Anthology of Love

100

SHORT STORIES IN HONOUR OF

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Anthology of Love
Copyright © 2025 Kartwheel
Self-published by Melanie Dass Moodley
2 Drayton Close, Somerset Park
Umhlanga, 4319
South Africa
melanie@kartwheel.co.za
www.kartwheel.co.za
ISBN: 978-1-997459-65-1 (print)

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except as permitted by copyright law. For information, contact Melanie Dass Moodley at melanie@kartwheel.co.za

For privacy reasons, some names, locations, and dates may have been changed. In such instances, any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Disclaimer: Although reference is made to Sai ‘centres’ and Sai ‘organisation’, this compilation of stories does not represent the views of any official organisation.

Cover & Design: Pranav Tulsiram
Layout & Typesetting : Keeren Govender
‘The Arthi’ Illustration: Trilokesh Moodley

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication
Foreword

OM SRI BHAGAWAN SATHYA SAI BABAYA NAMAHA – I bow to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba who is the Divine Mother & Father to us all

1.	A Lamp Extinguished. A Lamp Reignited	Jayanthie & Vallen Pillay	2
2.	From the Depths of Patal Bhuvaneshwar to the Heights of His Feet	Devan Naidoo	4

OM SRI SAI SARVA ROGA NIVARINE NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Remover of all Diseases

3.	A COVID Soldier Protected by Light	Sharoona Sewnarain	8
4.	A Red Bra, a Blue Pendant, and Multicoloured Pearls	Vissa Sivaraja	10
5.	The One and Only Doctor	Savy Ramlall	12
6.	I Am Because You Are	Tash	14

OM SRI SAI LOKA RAKSHA PARAYANAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Protects the World

7.	Swami to the Rescue	Thavie & Pragasen Morgan	18
8.	Gayathri, the Protector	Marlini Mansingh	20
9.	Thy Will be Done	Sogen Moodley	21

OM SRI SAI PREMA PRADAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Grants Love

10.	The Love Letter	Pragasen Naidoo	25
11.	A Match Made in Heaven	Lalini & Pat Reddy	26

OM SRI SAI PREMATMANE NAMAHA - I bow to the One who is Supreme Love

12.	The Voice Without a Body	Kaseran Munian	29
13.	In His Image	Priar Munian	31

OM SRI SAI BHAKTI JNANA PRADEEPAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Ignites the Light of Devotion & Spiritual Knowledge

14.	A Connection with the Master	Saan Zen	35
15.	The Divine Instruction That Transformed Me	Thrishaal Ghela	37
16.	The Fabric of my Life	Roy Govender	38
17.	Through the Wilderness	Karmishta Moodley	40

OM SRI SAI ADBHUTA CHARYAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Performs Amazing Unprecedented Acts

18.	The Greatest Miracle of All	Surie Govender	44
19.	Sweets from Heaven	Ashen Govender	45

OM SRI SAI ARTHI HARAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Removes Bodily & Mental Distress

20.	My Life's Morphine	Urvasi Pillay	48
21.	Faith like Superglue	Anonymous	49

OM SRI SAI APANNIVARINE NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Removes Calamities

22.	Wake Up!	Nerisha Goorchuran	53
23.	Out of the Jaws of Death	Dr Rajen Cooppan	54
24.	Saved by a Vision	Sanjay Singh	54
25.	He Parted the Sea like Moses	Prakashne & Krishna Naidu	56

OM SRI SAI ARTHATHRANA PARAYANAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Saves the Afflicted & Distressed

26.	It's OK	Anonymous	59
27.	From One Lifesaver to Another	Premilla Maharaj	60

OM SRI SAI SHIRDHI SAI MOORTAYE NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Incarnation of Shirdi Sai

28.	Wrong Door – Right Entrance	Manjusha Govender	63
29.	Prayers for my Parents	Dr Indera Baijnath	64

OM SRI SAI SHAKTHI PRADAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who bestows Strength & Energy

30.	My Son	Saloshnee Ramchander	68
31.	Soft and Smooth	Ramakrishna Naidoo	70
32.	You Teach Best What You Most Need to Learn	Sandy Chetty	72
33.	The Protector & Support of All	Nirmala & Ashish Nagasar	73

OM SRI SAI SARANAGATHA TRANAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Saviour of those who Surrender

34.	Whatever Happens is Good for Me	Dr. Tamarra Subramony	77
35.	A Test of Faith	Yaadh	79
36.	Surrendering Without Conditions	Anonymous	80
37.	Lost & Found	Nirmala Govender	82
38.	Love My Uncertainty	Vidya Naidoo	83

OM SRI SAI ANANDA DAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who grants Bliss

39.	Music is the Food of Love	Reena Pillay	86
40.	One Moment in Time	Preleen Kanthapersad	88

OM SRI SAI ASAHAYA SAHAYAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is Helper of the Helpless & Refuge of the Refugeless

41.	A Snake, a Rose, and Two Husbands	Sandra Rajkomar & Simone Naidoo	91
42.	Our Real Riches	Thavarangeni Govender	93

OM SRI SAI LOKA BANDHAVAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is Kith & Kin to the World

43.	Never Alone	Thergie Naidoo	97
44.	Swami Takes Care of the Minutest Details	Kenny & Saieswari Govender	98

OM SRI SAI SADHU VARDANAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Fosters Goodness

45.	Nine Seats for Nine Brothers	Nivesh Singh	101
46.	Life Lessons from my Life Stages	Eesan Moodley	103
47.	Hands that Help... to Lift Up the Lord	Krish Padayachee	105

OM SRI SAI MUKTI PRADAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One Grants Liberation

48.	Will You Remarry?	Vassie Padayachee	108
49.	A Life Consecrated	Cookie Reddy	109

OM SRI SAI KALUSHA VIDHOORAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Remover of Defects

50.	Life is a Marathon	Avinesh Pillay	114
51.	Slow and Steady Cleansing	Mano Nair	115
52.	Four Dreams, One Goal	Jay Subramoney	117
53.	My Father	Rayven	119

OM SRI SAI KARUNAKARAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is Compassionate

54.	Ēdavaku (Don't Cry)	Shirley Naidoo	123
55	A Swaying Garland for a Broken Heart	Saroj Naidoo	124
56.	From Cement Floors to Cloud Nine	Bimla Singh	125

OM SRI SAI SARVA HRDVASINE NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Indweller of all Hearts

57.	The Heart of Hanuman	Pam Roopanand	129
58.	A Son's Heartbeat Cured by the Indweller of the Heart	Linkey Moodley	131

OM SRI SAI VARADAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Giver of Boons

59.	My Wish Fulfilling Tree	Shirley Govender	134
60.	The Unseen Hand	Anonymous	136
61.	An Unexpected Gift	Panu Chetty	137
62.	"With Love. Sri Sathya Sai Baba"	Jothi Cooppan	139
63.	A Birthday Wish Come True	Indrani Naidoo	140

OM SRI SAI BHAKTA VATSALAYA NAMAHA - I bow to the One who has Motherly Love for the Devotee

64.	Footprints in my Heart	Saras Padayachee	143
65.	The Sacred Bond	Yoginie Naidoo	144

OM SRI SAI SADHU JANA POSHANAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Guards & Guides Good People

66.	My Kurukshetra, My Sai Krishna	Anonymous	147
67.	A Grandmother's Light	Nisha Sewpersad	148
68.	Too Many	Rose Appalraju	149
69.	A Painfully Shy Introvert Finds Her Voice	Premilla Subramoney	150

OM SRI SAI SARVA BHAYA NIVAARINE NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Dissolves all Fears

70.	Expanded Consciousness in a Confined Space	Prof. Guruvasagie Pillay	154
71.	Try	Yaveshni Naiker	155

OM SRI SAI BHAKTA JANA HRDAYA VIHARAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One whose Playground is the Heart of Devotees

72.	A Perfect Fit	Dr Theveshen Padayachee	158
73.	The Guru Within	Helen	159

OM SRI SAI SARVAJNAAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is Omniscient

74.	Conversations with my Creator	Anonymous	163
75.	On the Road with Sai	Morgan Govender	164
76.	Growing up with Sai	Anonymous	165

OM SRI SAI APAD BANDHAVAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is a Saviour in times of Calamity

77.	Life and Death are but a Single Breath Apart	Leshna Saikoolal	168
78.	Advanced Life Support of the Divine Kind	Nava Naidoo	170
79.	A Life-Defining Accident and a Life-Refining Relationship	Jai Singh	171
80.	Tears of Amrit	Salome Govender	173

OM SRI SAI MAHESHWARA SWAROOPAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Embodiment of Lord Shiva

81.	Glass Shrapnel, But No Blinking	Vasagie Pillay	177

OM SRI SAI ANNA VASTRA DAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who provides Food & Clothing

82. My £5 Day — Dhiren Naidu — 181
83. Prasadam for Two Hungry Stomachs — Saroj & Sundres Naidoo — 182

OM SRI SAI SAMSARA DUHKHA KSHAYAKARAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Destroys the Suffering of Worldly Existence & the Cycle of Birth and Death

84. Never Knew Love Like This — Shantal & Vernon Chetty — 185
85. My Beloved Sathyabhama, My Beloved Sai — Joy Gounden — 187
86. The Valley of the Shadow of Death — Vino Padayachee — 189

OM SRI SAI SARVA MATA SAMMATAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Represents all Faiths

87. A Spiritual Quest Fulfilled — Nithya Naidoo — 195
88. Sai Miracle in a Church — Pat Govinthu — 197
89. There is Only One Religion — Doreen & Basheer Shaik — 198
90. A Watch-Ful Encounter — Ronnie Rao — 199

OM SRI SAI SAKALA SAMSAYA HARAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Destroys all Doubts

91. The Taming of a Revolutionary — Indu Moodley & Paddy Sookdeo — 202
92. Cracking Through Disbelief — Krishni & Ivan Phekun — 204
93. With His Feet Like Butter, I Melted — Pitham Tulsiram — 206

OM SRI SAI SARVA SIDDHI PRADAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who Grants all Accomplishments & Success

94. Waiting for that Aha Moment — Mandy Chetty — 210
95. My Bestie — Saiesha Paramanand — 212

OM SRI SAI LOKA NATHAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is the Lord & Transformer of all Worlds

96. Yes — Sureka Singh — 215
97. The Great Wire Puller — Simla Ramcharan — 218

OM SRI SAI BHAKTA PRIYAYA NAMAHA – I bow to the One who is Precious to Devotees

98. He is Always with Us — Cookie Govender — 220
99. The World in Your Eyes — Reyesa Pillai — 221
100. More Than Ever — Meena Rooplal — 222

Arthi — 225
Images
Gratitude — 226
Glossary — 227
References — 233

Dedicated with love

To the One

The breath behind the words
The hand above the strokes
The cause
And the flow
The inspiration
And the fruition
The One
Whom we call

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

FOREWORD

I first saw Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Physical Form at the age of 19. It was the Christmas production of 1991, and I had been chosen to be the voice of a child actor playing the role of Mother Mary. This meant that I had the good fortune of sitting in the first row of the Poornachandra Hall with a microphone placed before me. To my left sat a fellow voice artist - an Australian in her mid-20s. As Swami entered the hall and began walking toward His chair, He suddenly paused, turned to her, and with a cheerful smile asked, ***"Secretary?"***

Tears welled up in her eyes as she replied, *"Yes, Swami."* She had last visited the ashram five years earlier. And yet, out of the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Prashanthi Nilayam every year, Swami not only recognised her, but also remembered her profession. Naturally, she was overwhelmed. As for me, I soaked in the divine encounter vicariously, quietly joyful for her. But there was little time to linger. I had to steady myself, take a deep breath, and be the best 'Mary' I could possibly be. After all, we were about to enact one of the greatest love stories ever told.

LOVE. Endlessly described by poets, contemplated by philosophers, debated by rationalists, and even attempts made at measurement by scientists.

The same can be said of GOD.

So how does one try to explain God, as an embodiment of Love, in the form of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba?

You don't.
You simply tell the story of your own life.
And how He showed up.
And left you better.

In commemoration of the 100-year advent of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the 100 stories that you are about to read have been contributed by ordinary people. Though their life stations and circumstances may be diverse, they share two things in common: they have been all touched by Sai Baba, whom they lovingly refer to as either 'Swami', 'Baba', 'Sai' or even the 'Master'; and they have all been willing to let down their armour to acknowledge His Hand in their lives.

Their encounters of Him are as varied as they are enthralling:
Sai Baba has appeared in dreams, in operating theatres, and at armed robberies.
He has offered counsel through interviews, letters, and silent awakenings.
He has rushed to the rescue at drownings, head-on collisions and suicide attempts.
He has showered sweets, sacred ash, and flowers.
He has healed life-threatening illnesses, grave injuries, and stubborn addictions.
But underlying all these experiences, is a single unbroken thread: LOVE.

When devotees of Sai Baba pray, it is not unusual to hear the chant of His 108 Names. One of which is: OM SHRI SAI PREMA MOORTHAYE NAMAHA - "I bow to the One Who is the Embodiment of Love". And when Sai Baba addressed His audience, He would almost always begin with PREMASWARUPALARA - "Embodiments of Love". This, dear reader, is a love affair! Each tale within these pages tells the story of separation. Between the Creator and His Creation.

I encourage you to read slowly.
And to focus not on what happened, but on what was learnt.

Not on who the contributors are, but on who they became.
It's the reason these stories are being told.
So that perhaps in one, or several, of these pages, you may find a reflection of yourself.

Every contributor wants not only to glorify Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in this historic year, but also to serve Him, through the Message of their own lives. Lives that have been lived across different continents, far from the village of Puttaparthi.

Through these stories, Swami's legacy lives on.
Through these stories, Swami is still here with us.
He never left.

It has taken me more than three decades to realise that the Divine utterance, ***"Secretary?"*** was not only directed at my Australian friend, but also at me. Now, in the sunset of my career, I have learnt that every one of us is beholden to the CEO - THE CHIEF EVOLUTION ORCHESTRATOR. Our job is merely to listen for, and carry out, His instructions, diligently. While we must always be held accountable for the quality of our work, all credit accrues to the CEO.

With that said, it has been both an honour and a privilege to have served as the secretary on this project. While indeed humbling, it also means that all correspondence and liaison has gone through me. I therefore take full responsibility for any errors made in the compilation of this work. While I would like to blame a computer that over-heated on several occasions, the truth is I've had to steady myself and take many deep breaths.

After all, we are about to tell the greatest love story ever told…

Thank You Swami, for our Divine Purpose, unfolding Right Now, with Your Grace, for our Highest Good.

Your Secretary

By which power of love the earth does rotate without axle or bearing,

By which power of love do the stars remain in the sky without falling on the earth,

By which power of love do the oceans confine themselves to the limits without inundating the earth,

By which power of love does the wind-god blow cool breeze in all the worlds,

That mighty power of love is verily the Atmic power.

That power of love is most wonderful, unique and all-pervasive.

The entire creation is permeated with that love.

- A poem recited in Telugu by Baba in 2004 (Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 37)

OM SRI BHAGAWAN SATHYA SAI BABAYA NAMAHA

I bow to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba who is the Divine Mother and Father to us All

1. A LAMP EXTINGUISHED. A LAMP REIGNITED.

I was merely 5-years-old at the time, but the dream was crystal clear: A very young Swami was visiting a home down my road and people were flocking to have His darshan. Curious little me also wanted to see Swami, so I walked to the backyard of this house where He was. I saw Swami sitting cross-legged on the floor with a God-lamp in front of Him. I approached Him slowly. Without looking at me, Swami extinguished the flame of the brass lamp with a flower. Then He picked His head up, and after seeing me, struck a match, and lit the lamp again.

I was far too young to make much sense of the strange dream, and so I tucked it away in the recesses of my mind, while my journey to Swami continued, filled with many wonderous experiences.

One of the most notable was a trip to Prashanthi Nilayam, with my 12-year-old son Vallen, in April 1999. We were unaware of how scorchingly hot India would be, and that Swami would therefore be in Whitefield, Bangalore. At our first darshan in this unfamiliar ashram, I was extremely nervous. Males and females sit separately, and Vallen was required to sit on the men's side. Needless to say, as a mother, I was anxious about my young son and kept craning my neck, trying to spot him in the sea of male faces. But I couldn't see Vallen at all.

Suddenly, the atmosphere became electric - Swami was emerging for darshan! Devotees began to adjust their positions, and squeeze closer together, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Lord. That particular day, Swami only spent a few moments on the ladies' side before moving over to the men's section. My eyes caught sight of a large clock on the wall with an image of Swami's eyes. Focusing my attention on it, I silently prayed, "*Swami, please go to my son.*" As I didn't want to keep straining to look for Swami, I chose to close my eyes and to ask Him to show me that my son was safe. However, something made me glance toward the men's side again. The scene before my eyes caused tears to flow down my cheeks…

Meanwhile, it seems Vallen was actually quite comfortable sitting in darshan without me. He was in the company of other South African males waiting expectantly and patiently. However, as soon as the darshan music began to play, Vallen was overcome with emotion, and began to cry uncontrollably. My son's tears only stopped when Swami stood in front of him, and he instinctively bowed forward to touch his forehead to the Lord's Feet. In that instant, his emotions calmed completely. Vallen then looked up toward the Lord and, with their eyes making contact, he handed a bundle of letters from members of our Hillside Sai Centre over to Swami.

… I watched as Swami stood right beside my son, and I watched as my son lifted himself slightly from his seated position, and I watched as Swami touched my son's hands and took the letters. Then, as the cherry on top of a mother's prized sighting, Swami turned and looked directly at me! As if to say, "**Why are you worried? Here is your son, right with Me.**" I sobbed from the depths of my heart, overwhelmed by what I had just witnessed.

During our stay, both Vallen and I were blessed to receive padanamaskar from Swami. But Vallen had what can only be described as a 'field day' with the Lord. He playfully joked that now that he had obtained padanamaskar, he was going to ask Swami for vibuthi next, and then an interview. And sure enough, when Vallen and a young boy of around 18 years, went to darshan together, Swami materialized vibuthi for this kind-hearted youth from the UK, who in turn poured half of his vibuthi into my son's palm. Having now achieved his second objective, my precocious son then began to persistently ask Swami for an interview, sometimes even tugging at His robe! When Vallen received his second padanamaskar, Swami just stood there, undisturbed, calmly collecting letters from other devotees, as my young son continued to press on His Feet, seeking His attention.

Swami's calmness speaks volumes about the Mother and Father that He is to all of us. Knowing that a young lad really does not need an interview, Swami still showered him with an abundance of Divine Love. It was only when we returned home to South Africa, that we would understand the reason for this. Because, a few months later, tragedy struck our family…

Vallen was closer to his dad than he was to me. He would often sleep next to his dad, and the two of them would attend satsang together, one playing harmonium and the other, tabla. One Saturday morning, my husband Ollen went to assist his brother to de-gas bottles at his brother's gas business. The plan was for him to return quickly and to take us out to the Spur for a family lunch. But Ollen never returned.

When we received a call informing us of a gas explosion, Vallen and his grandfather rushed to the site of the accident. All my son saw… was fire… and ambulances. When he tried to get to his father, a policeman held him back. But he could still hear his dad say to the paramedics, "*Take him away. Take him away,*" evidently in a bid to protect his son, right till the very end. Vallen had to settle for seeing his father in the hospital, where unfortunately, he lay unresponsive, in a room with an overpowering smell of gas. A trauma of this kind, suffered by a child so young, can be difficult to overcome. But the Divine Mother and Father had known all along… That's why He had showered Vallen with such attention and immeasurable compassion. In some way, it was to fortify him for the years to come.

As for me, I was 5,5 months pregnant at the time.

On the Thursday before the explosion, Ollen and I had found out that we were having a girl, and he named her Janani, which means Divine Mother. Two days later, I was in a hospital room telling Ollen to fight for his life, because he needed to see his daughter. But my husband had unconditional faith in Swami. His last words to me were: "*Swami is there*." He passed on a Thursday evening, at the exact time he would usually be carrying his tablas and walking into our Hillside Sai Centre ashram for satsang.

I was devastated… I was afraid… How would I cope raising my unborn daughter and my little son all alone? We had been active workers in the Sai organisation, but after Ollen's death, I stopped attending satsang. I also stopped washing my lamp, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. My mother would have to come home every week to wash and shine the traditional Hindu God lamp given to a woman at the time of her marriage. Externally, these were the signs of how broken I was. But internally, my faith in Swami did not waver. I knew He was my only refuge. Whenever I struggled and was in pain, I turned to Him.

I am now 60 years old and I have successfully raised two children, Vallen and Janani, both of whom love Swami dearly. I have also been privileged to visit Prashanthi Nilayam more than 30 times. None of this would have been possible without the Grace of our Bhagawan, for He has been carrying me throughout my life.

It has been 55 years since my strange dream, but its significance to me has crystallised with the passing of time. I had seen Swami sitting cross-legged on the floor with a God-lamp in front of Him. Without looking up at me, Swami extinguished the flame of the brass lamp with a flower. He then picked His head up, and saw me, which prompted Him to strike a match, and light the lamp again.

To me, this prophetic dream as a 5-year-old has come to mean only one thing:
My lamp as a wife would be extinguished… but the Lord would reignite the light in my life.

Whatever life may have in store for us, Swami is our Divine Mother and Father. He is all we have.

JAYANTHIE PILLAY (60) and VALLENDEREN PILLAY (38)
MEREBANK, DURBAN

2. FROM THE DEPTHS OF PATAL BHUVANESHWAR TO THE HEIGHTS OF HIS FEET

My journey with Swami began in 1990 at the Grasmere Road Sai ashram. Spurred on by the challenges I was experiencing at home, I was attracted to the many materialisations I witnessed there. I have seen the appearance of honey, turmeric, vibuthi, kumkum, coconut water, milk, oil, cloves, amrit, prunes, almonds, murthis, pendants, lingams, and strings - each with their own significance or medicinal purpose. One standout materialization took place on 23 November 2011, after Swami took Maha Samadhi. In the birthday cake that had been placed at the shrine, a lingam was discovered. As I slowly removed it, I found it to be encased in thick fragrant vibuthi and honey, and its energy was so powerful that it made my legs quiver. (*Refer: Image a*)

Even though I don't have much of a sweet tooth, birthday cakes have long been a feature on my Sai journey. It began in 1995, when I had a persistent vision of offering a birthday cake in the shape of a world map to Swami in Prashanthi Nilayam. Through the expertise of a friend's wife, a beautiful cake was baked, which I then carried all the way in a wooden box to India on my very first trip to Swami's ashram. That box, with its delicious cargo, only left my hands when I handed it in at the Prashanthi office. This birthday cake represented my first love offering to Swami. And on the morning of His 70th birthday, Swami graciously cut it, together with several other cakes.

I have since had the privilege of visiting Prashanthi Nilayam thirty times, sometimes making multiple trips in a year. During these trips, I have been permitted to make several other love offerings, from fruit bouquets, to Christmas decorations, to a paper mâché lamp. The latter was part of the New Year's Day programme, which I had really wanted to be a part of. But the students were very strict about the quality of their presentation to Swami and turned me down several times for not meeting their requirements. Still, I persevered, and through Swami's Grace (and perhaps my relentless badgering), they eventually agreed to us creating the lamp for the programme, with the theme 'Kalatheethaya Namaha.' Our paper mâché lamp was lit by Swami on 1 January 2011, the same year He left His Physical Body. (*Refer: Image b*) That lamp can now be found burning in Grasmere Road.

I don't think I have much creative talent. I just have the desire. And I keep asking Swami to use me to make a difference. The truth is, most of the time I don't know what I am doing, but - boom, boom, boom - just like that, it happens! Everything I do is for Swami. The first time I saw Him was during the akhanda bhajans of 1995. I walked into the hall super-excited and ended up sitting through the night. As a result, we acquired the first row for morning darshan. I waited expectantly for Swami to come out of His rooms, and I planned on asking Him for so many things. But, when He did eventually make His appearance, my tears overwhelmed me, and I was completely tongue-tied. So the compassionate Lord blessed me with padanamaskar instead. Later on, I would also receive the blessing of His Padukas…

For reasons unknown, I have always been drawn to Lord Shiva. As a result, I had a strong urge to embark on a pilgrimage to Patal Bhuvaneshwar, the ancient cave temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. After reading about how Swami had revitalized knowledge of this cave, I set off on my journey. Every step of the way, I felt Swami's Divine Hand. From the lawyer resident at the Sivananda ashram who flagged down my tuk-tuk, to the accommodation she organized for me at the Omkarananda ashram that flanked the holy Ganges, to the apprentice priest who joined our travel party, to the beautiful Valley of Flowers, to the hot spring bath I took in Badrinath in freezing cold weather - Swami always took care of me. At the culmination of my expedition, I had to complete a 14km trek, before entering a dimly lit portal where I had to hold a metal chain and climb down into a sharp 75 degree

drop, followed by a 120m descent into an ancient underground world of mythological significance. There, my eyes laid upon the wonderous rock formations of the legendary temple. And something inside of me stirred. I knew I had just completed a journey that had begun many lifetimes before.

As memorable and inspiring as my pilgrimage to Uttarakhand was, I headed back to Puttaparthi just in time for the Paduka Festival. But with barely any money left in my wallet. How I wished I could purchase a pair of padukas for Swami to bless, but I had to make my last few rupees stretch until I returned home. Once again, Swami showered His Grace, and a French family whom I had met at the Sivananda Ashram, and who journeyed back with me to Puttaparthi, offered to assist. Not only was I able to purchase the desired padukas, but Swami also stood in them, transmitting His Divine Energy. Today, those padukas are at the Grasmere Road Sai ashram for all to benefit from, as a physical symbol of our Beloved Swami. (*Refer: Image c*)

It was beside those very same padukas that I placed my first daughter who was born pre-term in 1997, weighing only 0,75kg. As soon as she was able to leave the hospital, we took her straight to the ashram where we conducted a Ganesha prayer, before placing her down by the padukas. While we were chatting amongst ourselves, a shower of sugar candy, sweets, cloves and vibuthi suddenly rained down upon my sleeping child. I knew this was Swami's way of blessing her. When we took her home, my family began to insist that, as per Hindu tradition, I 'open the book' to read her fortune and obtain the initials for her name. But I stubbornly refused. As far as I was concerned, my child would be named by Swami. While she had been sleeping by His padukas, I had quickly written a note to Swami saying: "*Swami, this is Your child. I am but her caretaker. Please will you name her.*" To my family's consternation, Swami didn't respond… at least, not for a whole week. But then, on the seventh day, He replied, using honey, turmeric and vibuthi. When dried, this mixture formed clearly discernible letters, on top of my folded note: "S A I U R I E".

In 2001, when my second daughter was born, I did exactly the same thing. Except this time, Swami made me wait two weeks, and on the 14th day, He wrote: "S A I S H I V A M".

Both my girls have completed the Balvikas programme and matriculated from the Sai school in Chatsworth. As a result, they have grown into compassionate, intelligent young women. For a while however, I struggled, as I was a single parent. Although it saddened me that my wife and I had to part ways, I accepted this as my karma, to be both mum and dad to my children. I did the best I could, and my girls now stand as testimony to that effort. I was always a perfectionist - from their shoes, to their lunches, to their alice-bands, I never compromised on quality. So, when I received a call one day from a teacher reporting how immaculate my girls were, and how the one had declared, in a Mother's Day tribute that, "*My father is my mother,*" I felt affirmed. My path was by no means an easy one, but I was able to travel it only because I was accompanied by the One who is Mother and Father to us all. Swami gave me the strength, the wisdom, and the means, to raise my girls and fulfil my duty as a parent.

For almost 30 years, I ran a thriving auto-valet business. I employed more than 50 staff and held several corporate accounts. It was from the proceeds of this business that I could afford the little luxuries for my girls, including our trips to India. And of course, I always had the urge to clean Swami's cars. After several failed attempts, it was during the Ubuntu pilgrimage of 2010, that I 'happened' to bump into Swami's driver at the village garage. We struck up a conversation, and I showed him some of the features of the key for the Mercedes Benz SLK200 convertible which he was unaware of. He then asked me, "*Would you like to valet Swami's cars?*" Would I ever! So, while all the other members of the pilgrimage were rehearsing or stitching costumes or building props or working in the canteen, I was delightedly conducting a carwash and valet service on Swami's cars. I ended up cleaning 9 of His cars, all luxury vehicles donated to Bhagawan by well-meaning devotees. But the most memorable car for me was the small, custom-made, silver Toyota into which His chair would be wheeled when Swami became too frail (*Refer: Image d*). It was in this car that I found a pair of Swami's simple

sandals, evidently a special pair kept in the vehicle for any unplanned excursions by the Lord. I must confess that a small part of me was tempted to bring those sandals home with me as a prize to be brandished. Fortunately, I overcame that weak urge, and humbly prostrated before the sandals instead.

I felt very blessed to have been used by Swami to wash and clean His cars. I had asked Him to use me to make a difference, and He did, through the only profession I knew. Unfortunately, two years ago, I was forced to close my auto-valet business. Following financial difficulties caused by the KZN floods and COVID-19, I had to take the painful decision to sever my only line of income for the past three decades.

Life continues to be challenging. But I remain wholly indebted to Swami. I believe this setback is His Protection from something far worse, and I accept it gratefully. I still have a warm home, and a meal to eat every day. And I still have the ability to serve. Every week, I use my skills to provide free fitness training, in a spirit of unity in diversity, to people of all races and religions from our community.

Money is important, yes, but not as important as health, and family. While society may have high expectations of life, my expectations are very different.
They have been shaped by living my life at the Feet of Sai.
With that perspective, one can only look up,
To our Divine Mother and Father.
And it's where I will remain, until the end.

DEVAN NAIDOO, 63
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN

"The totality of Divine Energy has come as Sathya Sai unto humanity to wake up the slumbering Divinity of every human being. I will not forsake you. I have come to help, to accompany, and to carry you. I can never forsake you. I will never fail in My duty to My children; but I shall be very grateful to each child of Mine who helps in My task."[1]

OM SRI SAI SARVA ROGA NIVARINE NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Remover of all Diseases

3. A COVID SOLDIER PROTECTED BY LIGHT

As I lay on the hospital bed, hooked up to the machines and clinging to life as I knew it, I felt a touch… It was a gentle touch, but a touch no less… Slowly, I turned my head toward it. But there was no one there...

Even though I had been slipping in and out of consciousness, the sensation I felt, and the sight before my eyes, were unmistakable. There, all along the edge of my body was a row of little lights. My body was in a halo of Light.

From the moment I received the positive test result on 28 December 2020, I became a COVID-19 soldier, fighting a deadly battle. Maybe I'm a tad dramatic but you could have asked me about any COVID protocol - I knew them all and I adhered to them without fail. But, somehow, the evil killer managed to enter my body, and wreak havoc.

It didn't help that I had been grieving the loss of Major, my German Shepherd, whom I had taken to the vet just a few days earlier. Because I was not allowed in, I was forced to hand my fur baby over, through teary eyes, at the entrance to the premises. It was the last time I would see Major, because he passed on Christmas Eve. I was devastated.

Christmas morning saw me join the online hawan programme in an effort to lift my spirits. But my depression soon mutated into an annoying cough and overwhelming fatigue. The deadly invader had found a compromised host.

But I was never going to allow COVID to get the better of me. I was a fighter, and armed with a powerful God on my side.

- A God who saw to it that my elderly mother and beloved husband, both with comorbidities, were not infected, even though they had been in close physical contact with me.
- A God who ensured that, despite the unprecedented medical crises caused by the pandemic, I was admitted into a brand new ward at a private hospital in Durban where I received nursing and medical care of the highest quality.
- A God who ensured that despite having no contact with my family and loved ones, I was never short of visitors – nurses, doctors, cleaners, and people of various faiths, all of whom would pray for me.
- A God who would not only send His materialised vibuthi, hurdee and honey, from the shrine of a complete stranger, but who would also ensure that there was a physiotherapist on hand to mix it into a paste and help me eat it.
- A God who would also send His powerful ochre robe from a very dear Sai family, a robe so divine and pure that I was worried I would infect it, and so insisted it be placed under my mattress, in every one of the four wards that I was moved to.

This was my God.

He was the one and the same God who came to my rescue during both my pregnancies (though then I knew Him by a different name). Against all odds, He had protected my baby girl from the German Measles I had

contracted, and he protected my baby boy from the harsh drugs prescribed for me when I contracted Shingles and was unknowingly pregnant. This God took care of us all. But it was only when my babies grew to be toddlers, that I learnt His Name.

Within six months, I set off, resolute in my quest to meet Him directly. The year was 1989 - a year of much violence and upheaval in our country. But, together with my fellow travellers from Clare Estate, He blessed us with a reassuring interview, at the Abode of Supreme Peace. **He told us not to worry. He told us that there would be peace in South Africa, not war. And He told us that He would take care of all His devotees.** Then He materialised vibuthi, poured it into our hands, and said: **"EAT!"**

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is that God. That is the Name and Form which embodies God for me. He is my dearest Swami. And, He has always taken care of me, guiding and protecting me through all types of 'war' – be it war in my country, war in my family, war in my mind, and in 2020, war in my body.

Lying on that hospital bed, with a physical battle raging within me, I somehow knew my time was not yet done. That row of lights not only outlined my body, but it also outlined my purpose. My first grandchild was about to be born, and the construction of my dream sanctuary in Durban North, the Abode of Peace, was about to begin. There was still much left to be done in this world, and I had a role to play in it.

After two weeks in hospital, most of which was spent in High-Care, I was discharged on my husband Ashok's 60th birthday, a day on which I felt motivated and strong enough to transition into home-based care. When I was admitted into hospital, I was already on medication for several chronic ailments viz. thyroid, hypertension, diabetes, gout. While I was in hospital, I developed cardiomyopathy as well as lung and kidney complications. But after I was discharged, they could find no trace of damage to any of my organs, and within a short while, I also had to discontinue all my previous medications. Through the Grace of Swami, my body had gone through a total reset!

I guess this was long overdue because my last physical reset took place when I was still in my thirties, when I was struggling to become a vegetarian. During that time, I had a dream of a massive Shiva Lingam, at the base of which was a note: **"Due to impending illness, do abhishekam every day - Baba."** The following day, Swami's words jumped out of a book I was reading: **"I do not appear in your dreams for no reason."** Knowing that I had to act, I went out and immediately bought myself a Shiva Lingam, but a small one, as we were living in a small flat at the time. I dutifully performed the abhishekam as instructed, and within two years, my commitment to ahimsa had acquired a firm hold, and I gave up meat with finality.

But unlike my vegetarian reset, my COVID reset was of a different kind. You see, I am a procrastinator by nature. And I clearly needed a jumpstart in many areas of my life. Most of all, I needed to be reminded:

- That not a blade of grass moves without Him willing it - Everything in my life, whether big or small, good or bad, has been orchestrated by Him for my highest good.

- That everything is connected - A few days after being discharged from hospital, I read the following words in a seemingly random message: **"Light will protect you."** Only then did I join the dots and realise what had happened to me. Even though we may not see it at the time, everything, no matter how small, is connected. Much like a row of little lights. And much like the light of a thousand prayers.

- That I am no different from anyone else - After all, COVID was the great equaliser, slaying all and sundry in its path - black or white, young or old, rich or poor - it didn't matter. But this soldier survived, when others sadly, did not.

Looking back, I know I have lived a life of struggle and toil. But I also know my life has been filled with Grace. For all the blessings and privileges I have received, I am deeply grateful. Every day, I accept them with folded hands, and on bended knees. But I choose to wear them as symbols of responsibility. And to see them as opportunities to serve.

For how else do I express my Gratitude to Him? To He who is none other than the Light Himself, and who one day, I hope to meet again… at the final reset.

SHAROONA SEWNARAIN, 63
LA LUCIA, DURBAN

4. A RED BRA, A BLUE PENDANT, AND MULTI-COLOURED PEARLS.

I have always had a very candid relationship with Swami. I love Him with all my heart, and I speak my mind with Him constantly.

When my annual mammogram test revealed multiple lumps in my right breast, I was in disbelief. Even though I had detected the hard pea-sized growth myself, it was still difficult to swallow the confirmation. So I went for a further CT scan – with the same result. Multiple little tumours were detected, which would need to be tested for cancer and surgically removed. To say that I returned home that day, 15 years ago, feeling very depressed would be an understatement. I believed it was the end of my life, and I started to give away all my belongings - my leather handbags, my shoes, my clothing – all the things women prize. I even wrote letters to my husband and to our three daughters, which I left at our shrine. I was extremely upset with Swami: *"Why are You doing this to me?"* I cried.

The next day, as I was walking to work in La Lucia mall, feeling very sorry for myself, I bumped into two Sai sisters. I greeted them and walked on, as I was in no mood for a chit-chat. I only wanted to talk to Swami. But my Sai sisters could sense something was terribly wrong and insisted on taking me to coffee before I started work. While initially reluctant, I ended up pouring my heart out and telling them of my test results. As fate would have it, the two of them were leaving for Prashanthi in two days, and they told me to join them. I said this was just not possible – I had a lot to sort out and I certainly hadn't budgeted for a trip to India. There is a term we sometimes use – 'God-sent' or 'Heaven-sent'. That morning, I began to fully understand its meaning. Because the only thing those two angels asked me was whether I had a valid passport. When I nodded 'yes', they told me not to worry and that they would sort everything out. While I insisted on paying them back, to this day, I still have no idea how they secured my flight ticket and visa so quickly.

Three days later, I was sitting for darshan in Prashanthi Nilayam. My heart was very heavy and I begged Swami for forgiveness. I knew it was very wrong of me to have felt so despondent and to have questioned Him the way I did. *"I'm so sorry Swami. You know what is best, and only You can help me,"* I lamented.

The three of us ladies were sharing a room on the fourth floor of an N-block within the ashram. As we had packed lightly, every day we would wash our saris and our underwear, and hang them on a clothes line just outside our room door. By the next morning, the clothes would be dry. One morning, I rose very early to go for darshan. As I began to get dressed, I noticed that my bra was missing. Everything else was still hanging on the line, but the red bra was nowhere to be found. (I still have no idea what inspired me to pack a red underwear

set for the ashram, but by that stage, logic had clearly escaped me!)

Anyway, I walked all the way down to the ground floor thinking my bra may have fallen off the line, but there was no sign of it anywhere. As it was around 03h30 and I did not want to disturb my roommates by unzipping and rummaging through my suitcase, I got dressed - without a bra. Over my blouse, and over my sari which I pulled tight around my shoulders, I also put a thick white shawl, and then I proceeded to darshan. (Now with hindsight, I can honestly ask - which woman goes to see the Lord without a bra?!)

Anyway, I sat at darshan conversing with Swami like I usually do. *"You know everything,"* I said. *"You also know that I am sitting here feeling very exposed, but all I can do is leave my problem at Your Lotus Feet."* Shortly thereafter, I began to feel very light – almost as if something had left my body. Yes, most women would describe not wearing a bra as a 'freeing' experience. But this felt far more than that…

When I got back to the room, I chided my Sai sisters for hiding my bra; but they swore they would never do such a thing to me. So the three of us looked everywhere for it, but the bra was never to turn up again. For the balance of the trip, I felt unusually relaxed – I did not even perform any more self-examinations. After initially questioning and berating Swami, I had now totally surrendered to Him.

When we got back home, I made an appointment to see a surgeon. But as the appointment was still a few weeks away, another supportive Sai sister, asked me to hand her any item that I would like to have blessed, as she was going to visit the ashram in Grasmere Road, Silverglen. I gave her my beautiful necklace with multi-coloured pearl-like beads which I was particularly fond of. Upon returning from Silverglen, she gave it back to me in a pouch with vibuthi. I thanked her and placed the pouch at my own shrine. Despite no one other than my children, husband and I entering our shrine, and despite me turning my house upside-down looking for it, that pouch with those multi-coloured pearls, disappeared the next morning. They simply vanished into thin air, or so it seemed…

Shortly thereafter, at my scheduled appointment, I showed the surgeon my mammogram and CT scans. After examining me thoroughly – twice – he said that he simply could not understand it. He could feel no lumps at all and there was no point even doing a biopsy. When I told him that I had prayed about it, the surgeon declared that my prayers had been answered!

This was not the first time Swami has healed me. About 20 years ago, I was diagnosed with early stage glaucoma. Again, I was terribly depressed about it. But I just spoke to Swami: *"You are my Doctor, Swami. You have to fix this,"* and I left it at His Lotus Feet. I would simply apply my chronic eye drops and go for six-monthly check-ups. Then, early in 2024, I began to experience blinding black and white flashes in my eyes. My specialist found that the vitreous gel was beginning to degenerate and detach from the retina.

Surgery was advised, but I intuitively felt that I shouldn't rush into it. I went home, and straight to our shrine, where I asked Swami to take all these problems away. *"I must see You. You must see me. No operation Swami, please."* These were the 'serious talks' I would have with Swami. I told Him, in a very business-like tone, that He was my Eye Surgeon, and no one else. I would also sleep with the picture of the Hiranyagarbha Lingam under my pillow and would touch it to my eyes every morning and evening. The blinding flashes slowly began to diminish in frequency and, after six months, at my regular check-up, my specialist found that the gel had moved back into place and surgery was no longer needed. Out of respect for my elderly doctor, I did not remind him that he has been treating me for early stage glaucoma for the last twenty years!

Swami hears everything I say to Him...

… Like the time I had made three gold pendants with a picture of Swami on a blue ceramic stone mounted in

a gold frame - one for my mum, my mother-in-law and myself. But unfortunately I lost mine, and I was really sad about it. I cried to Swami: *"How can I lose You, Swami?"* Then, one day unexpectedly, I opened a cupboard that we had already searched, and found the pendant pinned neatly to my sari, but this time with a brand new white ceramic stone. I could not believe my eyes and thanked Swami for coming back to me.

… And like the time, thirty years ago, on my first trip to the ashram with 40 other ladies. As we sat in darshan, I watched Swami walk away. I remarked to the lady sitting next to me: *"Swami is getting bald. He is losing His hair."* At that very moment, Swami raised His Hand and patted the back of His hair! The lady next to me was astounded. She exclaimed, *"Did you just see that? Swami heard you."*

Yes, nothing escapes our Swami. A month ago, and about the time the request was made for these stories of Swami, I was thinking back on my experiences and wondering what became of my multi-coloured pearl necklace. Can you imagine my amazement when I found, amidst my collection of photographs, an image I had never seen before?! An image where Swami is holding up a necklace of multi-coloured pearls, identical to the one that had disappeared from my shrine 15 years ago. *(Refer: Image e)*

Could it be that my necklace has gone to Swami? – I will never know.
Could it be that losing my prized necklace was the 'lessened karma' that I had to endure after being cured of multiple pea-sized growths in my breast? – I will never know.

But what I do know is that Swami hears and sees everything. While He sometimes may have a flair for the playful and dramatic - with disappearing underwear, exchanging pendants, and hiding necklaces - our precious Lord always knows what is best for us.

That is something we must never, ever doubt.

VISSA SIVARAJA, 69
DURBAN NORTH

5. THE ONE AND ONLY DOCTOR

When Swami stood on my feet 'accidentally', I had no idea that it meant I was being given another lease on life. (I learnt this only recently from a book written by another Sai devotee who had the same experience.) It happened at an interview in 1997. I was seated right in front of His chair and as Swami stood up and stepped forward, His Feet and mine made contact. My Telugu impulse was to say, *"Thappu, Swami"* and to shift back reactively. Swami also stepped back, but then He gazed at me with a look that I will never forget. It was filled with deep love and affection; in fact, so much love, that I slowly began to feel, somewhere inside of me, that something was wrong.

Upon returning to South Africa, my doctor found me to be pale and recommended that I have some blood tests done. I was eventually diagnosed with advanced leukaemia which I seemingly had for a while. I was 47 years old at the time, and without medical aid.

But Swami has cared for me every step of the way….

…. Like the time I had to go to King Edward Hospital for a bone marrow biopsy. Even though it was renowned

as having the best haematology department in the country, I was not prepared for the pain I was about to endure. In those days, the procedure entailed inserting a huge staple into the hip bone in order to extract some of the marrow. I was not under any anaesthetic, and the scream that came out of my mouth, was blood-curdling.

On the cabinet beside my bed, I had placed a photo of Swami. In that moment of excruciating pain, I saw that photo rise up and circle my head, followed by Swami's Form which appeared in front of me in a haze that looked almost like vibuthi dust. Then, I passed out.

When I regained consciousness, the doctor began to ask me a lot of questions about Sai Baba. To this day, that doctor continues to refer patients to me, to lift their spirits and to bolster their faith in God, especially when the illness takes its toll.

…. Like the time I lay in hospital feeling sorry for myself. In my mind, I said: *"Swami, you know how vain I am. I look so bad now."* I then opened a prayer book that I had brought with me to the hospital, and lo and behold, in it I found a packet of kumkum and a gold string. I had no idea how it got there, but when the nurse put the red dot on my forehead and tied the golden thread around my wrist, I felt so much better!

… Like the time in 2002 when I had accessory breast tissue the size of golf balls under my arms. The two lumps, one in each armpit, were so painful that I could not put my arm down. I was scheduled to have them surgically removed on a Thursday morning at St. Aidans Hospital. That Wednesday night, I cried out to Swami because of the pain, *"Where are You?"* Swami responded by appearing to me in a dream in which we were seated at a satsang. He said: **"Come here. Delaying again? Do you chant the Gayathri mantra?"** I responded yes. He said: **"No! You need to do it 108 times and not the way you are doing it."** He then proceeded to demonstrate how the Gayathri mantra should be chanted and said that it would be good if I chanted it 108 times, three times a day. Swami then got up and went outside. As I observed Him walk away up an incline, He put His right hand under His left arm, appeared to take something out, and then threw it into an adjacent bush. He did the same on the other side with His left hand. Swami then took the beige shawl He had been wearing and threw it to me. A few sages scrambled after it, but I managed to catch it and put it around my shoulders.

When I woke up the next morning, the lumps were gone.

In their place, were just two small holes and a little blood. My disbelieving doctor insisted I still come in for the scheduled surgery, but he ended up merely cleaning and disinfecting Swami's surgery, and putting a gauze in place instead!

…. Like the time I tried to organize a Ladies Day programme to take to the ashram in 2009. I endured many challenges and obstacles, to the point that I became uncertain of my own plan. That is, until Swami appeared to me in a dream and asked to see the programme. Feeling energized once again, I proceeded to make travel plans even though I was quite unwell and often suffering a high fever. It was now 7 years later and the painful polymastia had reappeared, but this time on the outer arms. It forced me to remove the sleeves from my blouses. Still, I pushed on and arrived in Prashanthi Nilayam. On 18 November, a coordinator of the Easwaramma Trust took our programme to Swami. He looked at it and said: **"Ahh. South Africa has come. Very happy!"**

We delivered our programme successfully on 19 November 2009, a time when Swami Himself was very feeble, at least to our human eyes. At the following darshan, a sevadal called me out of the third line to sit in the front. Swami, in His wheelchair, came right up to me, and I found myself getting up onto my knees to thank Him for all He had done. As my arms were sore, I inadvertently leaned on Swami's shoulder. But He did not retreat, and I fulfilled my desire to express my gratitude, before returning to my room, brimming with His love and energy.

It was only when I changed into a more comfortable dress that I noticed that the accessory breast lumps on

my arms… were gone.

Once again, the Lord had taken care of me. His own Physical Form was deteriorating, but He was still taking care of me.

It has been 28 years since my diagnosis. For reasons unbeknown to me, Swami extended my life at that fateful interview in 1997, and since then, He has been comforting me, operating on me, and even beautifying me! He knows exactly what we need, even before we need it.

He has proven to me the truth of His dictum: **"I am in you. You are in Me."**

SAVY RAMLALL, 75
SARNIA, DURBAN

6. I AM BECAUSE YOU ARE

Many of us keep searching for that moment in our lives - that moment when our miracle finally finds us. We question and overthink life and its daily activities. Before we can find what is meant for us, before we can understand what our true purpose is, life has a tendency to bring us to our lowest point.

I was about 18 years old when I felt that I had enough of this life. Nothing was working out for me - neither my studies, nor some of my choices. I guess, like many others growing up, I was young and idiotic, and I felt that everything I did, was wrong. I had no one to lean on, and no one to guide me. Each day, my depression began to worsen. One night, I cried so hard before eventually making the decision, to take my own life and end it all. I think I exhausted myself crying, because I fell into a deep sleep. It was then that I had a dream…

I dreamt of a man with big hair in a blue robe. This gentle and soft-spoken man told me that I was going to be fine, and that I just needed to have faith. I got up startled, wondering if the dream was real. It certainly felt like it was. As I lay dazed in my bed, I got an overwhelming scent of incense. *"Who is burning incense at 3am?"* I wondered. I looked around but saw nothing that could explain the scent. With that unmistakeable fragrance still lingering in the air, I fell off to sleep again.

A couple of hours later, I awoke and wondered what was going on with me. Again, I questioned whether the dream I had experienced was real or not. But throughout that day, I felt so much better, with no intrusive thoughts of ending it all. I had a smile on my face for the first time after many months. I just could not explain it.

The following night, as I lay in my bed, I wondered if I would have the same experience again. And sure enough, when I fell asleep, I again dreamt of the blue-robed curly-haired man. But this time, someone was trying to kill Him! In the dream, I could actually feel the pain - not just to Him, but to the many people around Him. Once again, I got up startled, but this time, my heart was racing from the shock and pain encountered in the dream. Until, I smelt that beautiful fragrance which hung in the air of my room. It was back, and in a manner I cannot adequately describe, that unmistakable scent soothed and calmed me. I sat up on my bed and decided, there and then, that I would never again contemplate taking my own life.

A few weeks later, I visited my granny. As I sat chatting to her, I began to get that familiar scent. When I asked her what it was from, my grandmother put a white powdery substance into my hand. That was it! The scent

of that powder was so overpowering that I immediately knew it was the same one I had woken up to, twice before. My grandmother then reminded me of the times she had taken me as a toddler to satsangs at the home of a Shirdi Sai devotee every Thursday. She told me about the power of Swami's vibuthi, and then she gave me my first picture of Sathya Sai Baba which I stuck inside my cupboard door. Every time I needed reassurance, I would open that cupboard door and gaze at the picture, before feeling an instant inexplicable relief.

From this point onwards, I would receive vibuthi, pictures, pendants, and rings of Sathya Sai Baba from random, sometimes unknown people, who would often start sharing their experiences with me, without my even asking.

Then, in 1997, my dad told us that we were going on a family holiday to India. As the itinerary included Bangalore, I asked him if we could please go to Puttaparthi to Sai Baba's ashram. After some convincing, my dad eventually obliged. We arrived in Prashanthi Nilayam just in time for the afternoon darshan and I got to pick a token - it was for row number 4. I didn't know what this meant, but guided by the sevadals, we sat in our allocated rows and waited. After a few minutes, I heard beautiful music begin to play, and I wondered what was happening. Then, I saw the gates open and this petite man with big hair in an orange robe entered. He was the same person in my dreams, but this time He did not wear blue. I looked at Him in awe, through tear-filled eyes. Tears that I had no control over. An overwhelming feeling of peace and love engulfed me. I was mesmerised. For the first time in my life, I felt that Someone knew that I existed, and was looking out for me. Protecting me. Watching me. Loving me.

Could this be the place I was searching for all my life? Could this be home? Where I belonged? Where I felt safe? I had written a letter before going to the ashram, but I never got the opportunity to give it to Swami. Nevertheless, all my questions and prayers were answered after leaving the ashram. It was an experience I will cherish and remember for the rest of my life. To this day, my family and I are all Sai devotees. Sending our kids to Balvikas was the best decision we ever made as parents. Swami's teachings and simple guidelines have made my now adult kids respect, understand, and cherish the lives we live.

I could never be totally sure why Swami appeared to me in a blue robe. Most of us are familiar with the phrases 'feeling blue' or 'the blues' which is commonly associated with sadness, loneliness and isolation. This is exactly how I felt at my lowest point. But since then, Swami has always appeared to me in dreams wearing blue. I would like to think it's because the colour blue, being associated with the sky, has calming and serene qualities. However, in terms of the chakras, blue is strongly connected with the throat chakra, which represents self-expression, communication, and speaking one's truth. Even though I sincerely made an effort, it was not unusual for me to dream of glass pieces coming out of my mouth every time I tried to speak. But life's lessons have a way of recurring, until we pass the test...

And so it was, that I developed some abnormalities in my throat area, which required a biopsy. On 24 April 2019, I sat in the doctor's rooms waiting anxiously for the results. When the doctor looked at me and said, *"I don't know how to tell you this..."* my heart sank. But then, what he actually said was that even though all my preliminary tests showed cause for concern, my biopsy results were perfectly normal. *"Your God must have His Hand on you"* were his words. What more could I have asked for on Aradhana Day! Sometime later, I went in for some reiki treatment where I was told that *"my throat chakra was blocked"* and that I needed to "*speak my truth.*" So that's what I have been working on ever since.

It was only as I tried to pen this story, that the dots in the picture of my life, slowly began to join.

But Swami always knew.

When He appeared to me wearing blue, more than three decades ago, He was already pointing me to what I needed to focus on in my life, in order to acquire inner peace.

Today, in everything I do, Swami is my Foundation and my Guide.
His unwavering Love reassures me.
I see Him in everything. Constantly.
Thank you, my Swami, for saving my life.
I am, because You are.

TASH, 50
DURBAN

My Dear

The secret of perfect health lies in keeping the mind always cheerful, never worried, never hurried, never borne down by any fear, thought or anxiety. [2]

In this world of change we meet with various vicissitudes of life, both pleasant and unpleasant. We are afflicted with diseases both mental and physical. The body is stricken with diseases and the mind filled with worries. In this state of our unhappiness, turmoil and misery, there is only one way and that is to take refuge in SAI. SAI alone can remove these difficulties and diseases and bring us health, peace and prosperity. He who has got SAI's Name on his lips is a jivan-mukta (self-realised one), because continuous remembrance of SAI eliminates the ego-sense and grants him the realization of his immortal changeless Self.

With Love.

Your SAI your own SAI (Sri Sathya Sai) [3]

OM SRI SAI LOKA RAKSHA PARAYANAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Protects the World

7. SWAMI TO THE RESCUE

It was a balmy Durban evening in September 2006 and we were returning home from visiting our grandmother, who was due to leave to Prashanthi on pilgrimage. I still recall the girls' giggles as we unsuccessfully tried making aeroplane sounds in the car homeward bound; my head filled with wistful thoughts of how lucky Aya was to visit Swami multiple times and questioning how long until my first time.

We decided to make a quick stop at the Engen garage on Essenwood Road for bread and milk. My husband Pragasen ran in while I remained in the car with our two young daughters (aged 4 and 10 months), who had fallen asleep during the drive from Parlock to Musgrave. It was around 18h30.

Our older daughter, Dhyasa, woke up and like any child of that age, began to ask the where, why's and how's of Aya's pilgrimage. While I was answering her, I noticed Pragasen being escorted out of the garage by four men - at gunpoint.

Understanding what was happening, I told Dhyasa to remain quiet, to not talk at all but listen only to my voice, and to undo her carseat buckle so that we could get out the car. I assured her that Swami was going to look after us. I got out the car, opened the back door on the passenger side, removed a sleeping Vedasya from her baby-seat, reached out to Dhyasa, who slid across and I held them both close, as Pragasen joined us. We then slowly walked away from the car, chanting *"Om Sai Ram"*.

By now, you would have gathered that we were hijacked. It was Swami alone who saved us! Given the situation in South Africa and the many hijacking casualties that we knew about, there were so many possibilities for how this situation could have played out - too harrowing to recount. That we emerged unscathed; that our toddler remained asleep during the entire experience; that our infant was calm and cooperative; and that we walked away 'cooly' while chanting …. it was all due to Swami's grace, guidance and protection alone.

But that's not all! The main part of our story actually happened in the garage itself.

Unknowingly, Pragasen had walked into an armed robbery in progress. As he entered the garage, he was met with the cash register tray being swung at his kneecap, which then dislocated. The hijackers were in need of a getaway vehicle and immediately knew that our 160 Toyota Corolla was common and inconspicuous enough. While still on the floor, shocked and in pain from the blow to his knee, one assailant began angrily demanding the car keys, Pragasen's wallet, phone and even snatched the chain from his neck.

Pragasen panicked because he knew that the girls and I were in the car and that in this volatile situation, the hijackers would waste no time in discharging their weapons for a quick escape. His knee was out and a quick glance around revealed two other men; one lying sobbing in a pool of his own urine and the other trembling from the trauma. The hijackers were agitated and eager to move on. Pragasen did the only thing he knew - he began chanting the Gayatri Mantra, aloud.

His assailant became irritated and showed it by hitting him on the back of his head with the butt of his gun. Still, Pragasen chanted. Then, his assailant cocked the gun, stuck it into his mouth and readied to fire. At that moment, Pragasen saw Swami appear in front of him and place His index finger behind the trigger so that it could not be pulled. The hijacker, confused, turned the gun to check why it had jammed.

Whilst seeing Swami standing clearly in front of him, Pragasen could also hear Swami's voice in his head. Swami reassured Pragasen that He would protect him. Pragasen mentally communicated to Swami that the hijackers would take our car and that we were in it and not safe. Again, Swami reassured him that He would protect us.

The hijacker then placed the gun into Pragasen's mouth for a second time and attempted to fire. Again, Swami placed His finger behind the trigger, preventing the shot. Swami turned to Pragasen and instructed him to stand up and tell the hijackers that he was getting his family from the car. Pragasen told Swami that his kneecap was out and Swami repeatedly assured him that it would be alright - He was there.

Drawing strength and courage from Swami's assurance, Pragasen ignored the taste of metal filling his mouth and did exactly as our Lord instructed. He still recalls being somewhat surprised that the hijackers became calmer and even agreed to let us go. His kneecap snapped back into place and he was able to walk out of the garage to us, so we could, as a family, leave the vehicle and walk to the safety of the pavement, chanting *"Om Sai Ram"*.

It was an experience that changed us forever. We moved halfway across the world, left behind family and friends and set up a whole new life. Looking back and reflecting on various other experiences and our personal growth over the years, we accept that the move itself was inevitable. So, we are not bitter, nor regretful, just grateful. We fully accept this experience as one amongst many, of Swami's assurance that He will guard us as the eyelid protects the eye.

Together with all of the other experiences of Swami's Grace in our lives, we have come to realise a few important truths:

- Swami alone holds our hands when we need leading, walks alongside as we need company and carries us when we are too weak or weary to keep going. He is our loving Mother, protecting Father, learned Teacher, wise Counsellor, truest Friend and the very Self whom we seek as we journey from self.

- There is a Divine plan in motion. When we say 'Yes' to Swami and where faith and surrender gift us clarity, there is no room for doubt or despair. Every moment, every wave (be it a crest or a trough) becomes an opportunity to reflect, be focussed and inspired to journey steadily on - immersed in the love that is verily our Swami.

- Life is filled with Swami's miracles. Every moment is a revelation, if we only choose to employ our 'Sai sight'.

- It is in the simple, seemingly mundane moments that the greatest joy can be found. Be it dawn's first golden ray, a robin perched on the hedgerow singing as you walk the dog, a frost flower glinting in the sun, the rustle of leaves as a gentle breeze wafts through, a soulful smile from a stranger on the tube, an unexpected message to say hello, a daily quote or just coming home in the evening - Swami lives in every single moment. Choose gratitude - it gifts us inSAIght and therefore peace and true happiness.

THAVIE (48) & PRAGASEN (49) MORGAN
UNITED KINGDOM

8. GAYATHRI, THE PROTECTOR

"Gaayantham Thraayathe Ithi Gayatri" (Gayathri is that which protects and redeems the chanter of the mantra)[4]

Saturday, 3 May 2025, became the day our family would provide testimony to the above sloka.

At 10h30, after the children finished their weekly Balvikas classes, we decided to stop at a shoe shop in Malboro, on our way home. As we walked toward the store, I noticed a van parked at the entrance into which shoes were being packed. Not thinking anything of it, we entered the store and I began browsing through all the children's shoes in the first row. Suddenly, a short dark guy marched up to me and commanded: *"You cannot stand here, we are busy. Please move."* It was only then that I noticed about ten other guys in the store who appeared to be shopping. Something felt off. The short guy then said, *"Follow me."* I did as I was told, innocently thinking that he was going to show me some shoes that were on sale. But as I walked forward, he said, *"This is an armed robbery. Please look here."* I went cold.

As I turned around to look at him, I saw that he had pulled his blue jacket aside to reveal a gun tucked into his waist. I immediately looked up at my husband who was following behind us, and tried to signal my fear. I squeezed my 11-year-old daughter's hand tightly, while my 7-year-old son and husband followed. We were led into an admin/store room at the back of the shop where we found 10 people already lying on the floor, face down, with their hands tied behind their back. I was petrified. The reality of what was happening to us began to hit me. My son Kunal began to cry and I became afraid the robbers would hurt him in an effort to keep him quiet. I pleaded, *"We have just come from our temple. Please leave us alone."* To which the robber responded, *"We are not here to hurt you. Just cooperate. We do not want any problem."*

They emptied my husband's pockets in search of valuables and took our car keys. The robber then asked to see my hands, but finding only costume rings, brushed them aside. Fortunately, my gold chain with a pendant of Mother Lakshmi around my neck went undetected. We were then pushed to the floor and my husband's hands tied behind his back with his shoelaces. I knew then that we were helpless and that our only weapon was the Gayathri Mantra. So I whispered to the children to please chant the Gayathri and pray to Swami.

For the previous few months, I had been attending weekly online vedam classes where I learnt to chant the Sri Rudram, with proper breath control and intonations. Then, a few weeks before the incident, I had also reached out to my tutor and requested guidance to correctly chant the Gayathri mantra, which I had been practicing diligently. As we lay on the floor, with a musty carpet up against our faces, we kept chanting, softly, but persistently. As I did so, I remembered the story of Air India Kanishka which exploded in a terror attack in 1985. With reference to that incident, Swami had said, in a matter-of-fact tone: **"There were more than 250 passengers onboard Kanishka. Even if one had chanted the Gayathri Mantra, the accident could have been averted."**[5] Filled with faith in the Gayathri mantra, I did my best to chant it correctly. I prayed to Swami, to Maha Vishnu and to Lord Rudra. I also visualised Prashanthi Nilayam. If this was to be the end for us, I wanted those to be my last thoughts.

After a few minutes, a lady got up and said, *"They are gone."* But I was still so scared that I urged her to stay down and keep quiet. But she insisted that the robbers' van was gone. By the Grace of God, and the power of the Gayathri mantra, our ordeal ended without anybody being hurt. Our car, together with our bags, phones and valuables were gone. But miraculously, with the assistance of the police and car-tracking company, our car was recovered a mere 3 hours later, undamaged, and with my handbag still in the boot!

The whole incident was extremely traumatic for all us. But I know with conviction that our family's daily spiritual practices and prayers are what saved us. Sometimes these can become routine mechanical habits, but we must always have the faith that the Vedas will come to our rescue, when it matters most.

We are so grateful to Swami for making the ancient Vedic wisdom accessible to all His devotees. For ultimately, it was Swami, in the form of Mother Gayathri, who protected us all.

MARLINI MANSINGH, 44
BUCCLEUCH, JOHANNESBURG

9. THY WILL BE DONE

It was almost dusk as I made my way home one Friday evening in 2007, bhajans playing softly in the background and supercharged after our weekly Clairwood hospital seva. As I turned into my home street, I noticed someone frantically flagging my vehicle down. I slowed down. My initial reaction was to see if the dark clad figure needed assistance. Within seconds however, I realised that this was actually an armed robber on the prowl for a 'getaway' vehicle for his accomplices' unfolding robbery at the corner supermarket in Shallcross, Durban.

In slow motion, I witnessed the flash of white light and heard the blast of that haunting gunshot.

I instinctively called out *"Swami"* and felt my car accelerate forward. There was no time to think, or feel. In that critical moment of danger, I just surrendered to Him.

When I returned to the crime scene later, the constable explained that the bullet had miraculously lodged itself squarely into the small barrel of the locking mechanism in the driver's door. According to him, if it were a few centimetres either way, and given that I was shot at point blank range, I would most likely have fulfilled my peaking curiosity of experiencing exactly what the astral plane would feel like. But of course, it seemed like the Avatar had other plans for this insignificant soul.

Filled both with a deep sense of gratitude to the Lord for a renewed lease of life on the one hand, and an overpowering desire to do something about the wave of crime and spiralling violence that our country seemed to be trapped in, an idea germinated a few weeks later over dinner conversations at my Sai brother and sister's home. If the heart of our dear Lord had melted at the desperate, but sincere cry of one poor fool, could He not be petitioned by thousands of devotees, all singing out to him in pure love, united by a common purpose - to get his Divine Blessings for our land? And more than just song and dance, what if we used a powerful drama with children from diverse backgrounds to tell the story of our beautiful land? The (his)story of how against all odds, our people stood up against colonial and apartheid injustices and through their struggle and resilience saw the bright new dawn of democracy. What if the story we scripted ended in a prayer to the Lord asking Him to guide and guard us once again as we collectively navigated the new challenges post-democracy? Most importantly, what if we used this love offering to the Lord as a tool to unify our own organisation, breaking barriers of geographical boundaries of centres, regions, provinces, and of race, gender, age and other artificial constructs? Would this not melt the heart of the Lord?

The answer to this question came a whole three years after my shooting incident. I was afforded the privilege of coordinating the South African musical production of Ubuntu that was offered at His Lotus Feet on the 28 September 2010, just six months before Swami took Mahasamadhi. Over 2500 devotees were transfixed

on the face of our Lord, and his childlike musings, as He savoured the performances of 356 pupils from four Sathya Sai Schools along with Sathya Sai Education (SSE) and Balvikas children, all accompanied by live contemporary musical performances from hundreds of devotees singing full throated to their Divine Master.

The memory of our Lord watching in rapt attention - the children in their African Big 5 costumes, the changing scenes, each coordinated by different geographical regions and coming together in harmony to tell an important story - was unforgettable. There was just something about that day and the build-up to that moment over the 6 months of rehearsals, punctuated with miracles of vibuthi appearing at practice venues. In retrospect, perhaps the greatest miracle was the tangible feeling of unity and love that brought our entire organisation together, and that had moved our Lord, who had not been out for darshan for days before, to bless us with his Darshan (Sight of the Lord), Sparshan (Touch) and Sambarshan (Conversation).

For me personally, this was a wonderful demonstration of who the real Director of the drama of our lives really is; how each of our life-scenes are planned according to a Divine Script; and how our duty is to merely perform our roles as best as we can, leaving the outcome to Him.

As we celebrate the centenary of the advent of our dearest Lord, exactly 15 years since our Ubuntu love offering, what a wonderful time it is to reminisce and replay those moments, to reflect on the many lessons we learned and to appreciate the love of our beloved Bhagawan. More importantly perhaps, it is an opportune moment to reconnect with the Swami within, and to pray for His guidance to make us worthy instruments to help lead our communities and our country at a time of unprecedented global change. Each and every one of us has been selected by Him to play a part in His Divine Mission. Nothing happens without His Will – even that 'random' violent act by a gunman was indeed all part of His Plan that triggered a set of beautiful moments, years later.

All we have to do is surrender, and let His Will be done.

SOGEN MOODLEY, 55
UMHLANGA, DURBAN

Dear children,

These days we are very unfortunately witnessing before our own eyes the evils of Kali age being freely practised by men bringing sufferings upon themselves and others. To counteract the evil forces that are gaining ground, the only way prescribed is the chanting of Sai's Name, the glory of which has been extolled again and again.

All devotees and well-wishers of humanity should now wholeheartedly take to the chanting of the name of Sai (their mantra) for longer and longer hours daily with faith and devotion and thus contribute their might towards bringing peace and happiness in this present world of strife and turmoil.

My blessings to all.

Baba[6]

OM SRI SAI PREMA PRADAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Grants Love

10. THE LOVE LETTER

It can only be through past good karma that I was afforded the grace of being born into a home where the teachings of Sai were already a way of life. I grew up immersed in Swami's work. In fact, our garage also served as the home of the local Sai centre. Singing bhajans was not a choice for me – it was food for my soul.

This immersion also meant that I was always surrounded by other children from the Sai fold, who would later become youth and adults, supporting one another in our spiritual growth. We developed as instruments of His Divine message, even as we scattered all across the globe. It was clear that Swami had a plan for each and every one of us. As for me, He kept me close to home, where I guess my mission and purpose remain, right here in Durban.

For all these blessings, I will forever be grateful to our Mother Sai – who has not only blessed me with an inspirational earthly mother, but who has also always been there for me, guarding and guiding me with all of life's decisions, both mundane and important. Like the time in 1996, when I was blessed to be at His Lotus feet in Prashanthi Nilayam as my chosen gift for my 21st birthday. What better way to enter adulthood than to be right there with the Poorna Avatar.

At the time, I was already in a relationship with a girl, one that had sprouted from being just school buddies, to confidantes, to soul mates growing on the spiritual path. Since I was in Prashanthi, I decided to take the opportunity to write many letters to Swami and hand them to Him during darshan. In the first few days, all my letters were taken by Him… except for one! I had many seats in row one, with Swami blessing me with padanamaskar on many occasions. He even took my handkerchief a few times after materialising vibuthi. I felt really blessed, but… He was just not taking this letter.

Every letter I had carried on behalf of devotees back at home, was taken, but my one most important letter stayed with me. At every darshan, Swami would come and always stop right by me, look at me, smile, and take all the other letters but not *the* letter. By now, I was getting worried… seriously worried.

The contents of my letter were: *"Dear Swami, if You approve of this relationship, please give me your blessings of marriage, by accepting this letter."* I told no one about this letter - not even the young lady in my life.

By now, so much was going through my mind: Do I defy Swami if He does not take my letter? Do I marry anyway? In my heart of hearts, I knew this was my partner for life. But my Lord had not given His consent. What do I do?!

My pilgrimage was drawing to an end. With 3 days before my departure, I sat at darshan, feeling weighed down and confused. Once again, Swami came right up to me, stopped, and looked over my head receiving letters from everyone around me, but just ignoring me as if I was not there. But then… He looked straight down at me… at the tears rolling down my cheeks… and took the most important letter I have ever written in my life.

With the letter in His hand, He gently tapped it on my head three times, while nodding His own head up and down. But His Love and Compassion did not stop there, because He also slowly pulled His robe to His ankles, in a signal for me to take padanamaskar. In that moment, it felt as if it were only Him and I in that vast Sai Kulwant hall. My heart and soul were full beyond expectations. The joy of knowing that the life partner you have chosen has been blessed by your Lord and Saviour, was really overwhelming.

After that Divine Exchange, I now had to tell everyone the contents of my letter. But with it already being ordained by Swami, there was no need for me to get down on my knees and propose! I am truly grateful that Swami's presence and guidance continues to keep our bond and marriage blissful.

Thank you Swami. When I count my blessings, I know You have held my hand and walked me through every step of this life.

PRAGASEN NAIDOO, 49
MORNINGSIDE, DURBAN

11. A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

It was August 1988. I was a graduate, lecturing, and living comfortably with my family in Verulam. However, as my 25th birthday approached, I became very depressed, questioning my purpose in life.

As a result, my parents decided to invite the Verulam Sai bhajan group home for satsang, which was a most elevating experience for my family and I. This was the first time that I realised Sathya Sai Baba was actually living in India. As a young girl, I used to attend satsang at my neighbour's home on Thursdays, but I did not realise then that Sai Baba was a Living God.

I then became involved in the Verulam Sai Centre and used to travel to Sunday morning satsangs at Sudha Mandhir in Chatsworth, the headquarters for the Sai Organisation at the time. I soon joined the Balvikas Teacher Training programme and began teaching Balvikas at the Verulam Sai Centre. I was happy and fulfilled.

Shortly thereafter, I began preparing for an exhibition at Sudha Mandhir, and in the process, met many youth including Pat Reddy, the son of Mr MC Reddy, the first Chairman of the Central Council in South Africa. Pat and his dad appeared to take an interest in me.

On 20 November 1989, the two of them had an interview with Swami. Pat's dad asked Swami if Lalini would be a good match for his son. Baba replied, **"Good girl, good girl. Marry in two months"**. We received a telegram and phone call from Prasanthi Nilayam in which father and son asked that we all come to Prasanthi in December 1989. My family, together with Pat's mother, then travelled to the ashram. Upon arrival on 12 December, we had special tokens for a first row darshan.

Our first experience with Swami thrilled us. At the afternoon darshan, Swami called my dad for an interview. All forty-five South Africans with scarves also rose and headed to the verandah. Fortunately, Swami invited us all into the interview room. I carried with me a bundle of letters and somehow managed to place them on a little table near His chair.

Swami spoke mostly about education. He asked what the goal and purpose of education are. None of us had the correct answers. Then He spoke briefly to my dad and Pat's dad. He also materialized vibhuthi right in front of me, which He poured into my right palm and into the hands of Pat's mother, before sprinkling the rest on the others. The vibhuthi was very warm. He then told us to eat it, which I did. Swami said that Pat and I knew each other in our previous life, but that we did not marry, and that we should now marry, and within two months. At the end of the interview, we all took padanamaskar.

During the two weeks that followed, we waited for Swami to call the wedding. But He didn't, so Pat's dad advised

that we go back to Durban and prepare for the wedding. Which we did, but of course not before doing some wedding shopping in Bangalore!

The huge wedding was organised within two weeks and included an open invitation to all Sai devotees. It took place on 20 January 1990 at the Kharwastan Temple Hall, exactly two months after Swami gave His blessing.

Nine months later our first son Nanda Saikumar was born on 22 October 1990 and three years later our second son Sathyanarayana was born on 23 November 1993. Both have completed 12 years of Balvikas with me as their teacher.

Pat and I have now been married for 35 years thanks to the blessing of our Lord. As with our union, His choice to focus our interview on education, was also not random. During our years together, Pat and I have remained dedicated to the service of the Sai organisation including serving as Director of the SA Institute for Sathya Sai Education, as member of the World Education Committee, and as SSEHV Trainer responsible for training secular school teachers in 12 countries across Africa.

We are humbled and grateful for the privilege of this union, and for the privilege of serving Him.

LALINI (61) & PAT (69) REDDY
CAPE TOWN

Dear children,

You are not just boy and girl, meeting and mating. You are Shiva-Shakthi, as truly as I am, the right half and the left half of the same body.

May you be ever in the shade of joy and contentment; may you both float as one on waves of ecstatic love; may you sway merrily on the flower-decked swing of faith, held by the ropes of courage and confidence; may the boat which you are boarding this day be loaded with happy comradeship and festivity, health and wholesomeness; let it reach, safe and smooth, the lotus Feet of the Lord. Row it forward, both of you, with the oars of surrender and service; let its sails be filled with the breeze of Grace.

Yours,
Baba[7]

OM SRI SAI PREMATMANE NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is Supreme Love

12. THE VOICE WITHOUT A BODY

My journey with Swami didn't happen all at once. He came to me at different stages in my life, through experiences that were not physical, but were deeply felt. I didn't grow up attending Balvikas or weekly bhajans, and I didn't follow a strict vegetarian diet. My family was simply the stereotypical Tamil household that observed the fasts and rituals of prayer days. As a child, I would question why we prayed on those days, and my parents would always have the same response: *"We do it because our parents did it."* Then, in 1998, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and everything changed.

I was only 11, but I could feel the fear that loomed over all of us. The cancer felt like a death sentence. A cousin, who was a Sai devotee, suggested that we visit the ashram in Grasmere Road, Silverglen. As we stood at the entrance, waiting our turn to go in, her husband said something that impacted my younger self: *"How nice it would be if Swami gave us a sign that everything will be okay."* As we stepped inside, the host began to explain the miracles that had taken place there — manifestations of Swami's hair on His photos, footprints, vibhuti, honey, and milk - all appearing on the sacred images of Sathya Sai Baba. It was surreal. 10% of me was sceptical, but the other 90% was in complete awe and trying to wrap my head around it all. We walked through the space and bowed in front of the deities, before reaching a wall adorned with various divine images. There, my parents and I stood with our eyes closed in prayer… when suddenly… out of nowhere… sweets began to fall on us. Pink and white sugar candies, éclairs, and other treats rained down, landing on our heads and shoulders. We were shocked and instinctively looked up to see where they were coming from. But there was nothing above us — no source, no trick. The sweets were simply materializing out of thin air. After a few seconds, it stopped. I remember rushing to collect the sweets from the floor and Swami's chair where they had landed, and I remember holding on to them like little treasures. From that moment, all our doubts vanished. This was the sign we had asked for. This was Swami's way of telling us that my mother would be okay. And she was.

That day changed everything, for it was the day that Swami announced His presence in our lives. Thereafter, life pretty much carried on as usual, but now Swami's photograph was added to our shrine, and our family fasted on Thursdays. Unfortunately however, my teenage years loomed ahead of me, and Swami soon became an afterthought. Until I began my university studies, where I met Priar…

I was very playful and immature, and I spoke a lot. One day, Priar and I were engaged in friendly banter and without thinking, I blurted out, *"I will never pray to your God!"* But the moment those words left my mouth, I felt an equally playful and weirdly reassuring voice within say, *"You will regret what you just said."* I believe Swami used Priar, an ardent Sai devotee, as His instrument to bring me properly into His fold. As we dated, I was exposed to many Sai youth events which I found to be a safe space, where there was no judgement, just young people with a common interest working toward one goal. Even though it felt good to be there, I also felt like the odd one out, as I had no grounding in spirituality, which meant that I often needed to learn the 'lingo'. However, the youth and the organization were so welcoming that soon my lack of confidence faded, and I became more involved in the seva programmes and musical productions, and even started my own personal sadhana routine.

I used to have a little blue and white book called 'Sai Darshan' which was my go-to guide, and through it, Swami would communicate with me. Whenever I had a question or a feeling that needed resolution, I would just turn to a random page and the answer would be there. I must stress that the messages I would receive in this manner were never vague or obscure, but rather very direct responses. Through this book, I felt like Swami was with me all the time. In fact, I used the book again after a long time to ask if it was okay to share my experience for this anthology. I opened to the following excerpt: **"When you experience me, share my glory and stories"**!

As my sadhana increased, so did my yearning to see Swami in Puttaparthi. I longed to be like many of the other youth who went on yearly pilgrimages with their families. Unfortunately, not only did we not have the money for a flight ticket, but my parents would never allow me to travel alone and they did not know anybody in the organization. Then finally in 2010, when Priar and her family were going to Prashanthi Nilayam, I was certain I could go too. But my hopes were once again dashed, as we didn't have the money for it. I became so angry and upset with Swami. *"Why don't you want me to visit?"* I asked. Immediately, an inner voice instructed me to *"Open the Sai Darshan book."* As I did so, the message on the random page made my eyes light up: **"I do not require you to visit me now... Your time will come..."** Reading that message transformed me from complete distress to sheer ecstasy. It gave me the reassurance that everything happens for a reason and in His time. From this point onwards, I jokingly began to refer to Swami as 'the voice without a body', because even though He didn't want me visiting Him, He guided me through His voice, which I 'heard' through books and internal messages.

Early one morning, Swami appeared to me in a dream. He was wearing my favourite burgundy robe and appeared to be in an empty blank space. His face was pale, and He just stared at me, without any words. I was awakened from the dream by the sound of my mobile phone ringing. It was Priar calling to tell me that Swami had just left His Physical Form. Yes, it was the morning of 24 April 2011. When Priar said that Swami was no more with us, I was neither surprised, nor upset. While a part of me was sad, another part was happy. You see, I had always felt like I was a rookie in the Sai organization, but that morning, I felt special. When Swami dropped His Physical Form, I felt that, through my dream, I had just encountered one of the best experiences ever.

A year later, Priar and I planned to be married. I think our parents thought we were crazy as we were two graduate students with only temporary jobs at the time. While Priar had unwavering faith, I was anxious and filled with doubts about our finances. The two of us had selected a wedding band which Priar really liked, and only the two of us knew how much it cost. I had been saving money for the wedding but was short of the amount required for the ring. I didn't want to ask my parents, so I began to contemplate working overtime to help cover the cost. Not knowing what else to do, I just surrendered it to Swami. One day, shortly thereafter, I received a text from my bank: *'Money R xxx credited to your account.'* It was the exact amount, not less, not more, but the exact amount required for the ring. And the reference of payment was 'Unknown.' Even though I knew immediately who it was from, I waited two weeks for the money to stay in my account. During that time, I contacted the bank on several occasions and went to great lengths explaining that this was not my money and that it was likely deposited in error. Eventually, a banker told me that the money had come from another unknown account, and as two weeks had already passed, I should just be happy and keep the money. I simply said a silent prayer of thanks to Swami!

After the wedding, we went on honeymoon to India, with Prashanthi Nilayam being our last stop. But before we made our way to the ashram, there had been a question that had been plaguing me for a while back at home - I had been wondering why the prayer 'Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu' had been changed? With this unanswered question banked somewhere in the recesses of my mind, we landed in the Abode of Supreme Peace, and it was magical. However, I also landed with some guilt. As I was the first in my family to travel abroad and as I had always wanted to travel with my parents and to pay for their tickets, I felt a sense of guilt. But as I walked into the Sai Kulwant hall, I felt Swami's Love and reassurance and I heard His 'voice' say to me: **"I am with you. I am your mother and father."** Not seeing Swami physically was normal to me, so being in Prashanthi 'without' Swami was also normal. Every night I would ask Swami for a bhajan that I would like to hear His students sing, and without fail, every single bhajan request was fulfilled the following day, which usually started with me waking up to see hues of pink in the room, in the early morning light. For me, these were all signs of His Love.

On one of those days, while Priar and I were on a visit to the sports centre, an elderly man, likely in his 60's, of medium height and build, and wearing an old dark grey jersey approached us. He asked, "*Are you from South*

Africa?" When I replied yes, he told me that Swami had said I must be told why it was 'Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu'! Surprised, I bent forward to listen carefully. He said the prayer initially meant *"Let all the people in the world be happy."* But now it meant *"Let all the beings, in all the worlds, be happy."* He said when we pray for others, we become selfless and we tap into greater consciousness. As I stood there, listening to the response to my long-forgotten question, I searched deeply into this strange man's eyes. They bore an uncanny resemblance to Swami's eyes…! The man continued by telling me to chant the Sai Gayatri, every morning and evening, as it would make my heart pure. And then, he did something that made my heart stand still…! He handed me a book and said, *"Swami wants you to have this book"*. On its front cover was a title in Kannada, "Asariravani." Seeing my perplexed look, he continued, *"For you, it means VOICE WITHOUT BODY!"* This was a full circle moment for me, the magnitude of which cannot be described in any book. *(Refer: Images f & g)*

I was extremely emotional and grateful to Swami for welcoming us to His earthly abode in such a profound and jaw-dropping manner. I had absolutely zero doubts that He was God. Swami's Love is immeasurable, boundless and pure. May we always remember that He is with us every day, all the time. He never leaves us.

KASERAN MUNIAN, 37
DUBAI, UAE

13. IN HIS IMAGE

While my husband Kasey may have felt that I was instrumental in bringing him into the Sai fold, the truth is that I was simply trying to follow my own truth, along a path which had begun when I was 7 years old.

My young mother had wanted her three little children to follow a spiritual path, so on the recommendation of a friend, she started to take us to bhajans every Thursday. We would sit on the floor in a community hall while people played instruments and sang. I clearly remember being fascinated by a slightly older girl who was playing the thaalam. It was the first time I had seen an instrument like that and I was amazed by the way her hands moved to the rhythm of the bhajans. I would sit behind her every week just to watch her play, hoping that one day I would be just like her. As for Swami, I didn't really know much about Him, but I really enjoyed attending the satsang, where everyone was so nice to us.

Soon thereafter we were enrolled into Balvikas, and because I loved my normal school so much, I was very excited to now be attending another school on a Saturday morning. Dressed in our plain white Punjabis, over which hung our Balvikas bags, I found that I loved attending the classes where we learnt new prayers and stories about God and the different deities. I especially loved the colouring homework. In fact, our new Sai family was the best thing ever! My sister and I were also studying Bharatanatyam so every year we would dance in the Balvikas production for Swami's birthday. As we grew older, we began to understand that Swami was God, the Guiding Light in our lives.

Towards the end of primary school, an incident occurred which exposed me to how cruel the world can be. I was treated unfairly by my teachers and there was nothing anyone could do, not even my parents, though they tried. I was very young, but I realised very quickly that being the smartest person in the room wasn't good enough - people could still cheat, and be mean, and get away with it. I was hurt, and I had to try and pull myself together. I found comfort in the fact that Swami knew the truth, and I tried to focus on being a kind person, as opposed to just a smart person. But my teenage years just got worse. I hated the world; I felt like no one understood me and that they always treated me differently; I was moody; I preferred my own company;

and I had very low self-confidence. All of this was exacerbated by colourism which, at the time, was at its peak in the Indian community. I could see how people, including my teachers, would treat girls based on the colour of their skin. I felt invisible and I began to increasingly draw inwards, with the belief that I could not have all the opportunities that others had, simply because of the way I looked. (As I write this now, I realise how ridiculous it sounds, but it was my truth at the time.) I was not the cool sporty girl, neither was I the pretty girl, I was just the nerd. I felt so hurt by the world that I was prepared to be alone for the rest of my life.

But in November 2005, my journey of self-love began. Yes, it was my first year of university where Kasey would become a big feature. But it was also the year my dance teacher planned a 2-month trip to India to train under her dance guru. Furthermore, it was Swami's 80th birthday, and my dance teacher, who was also a Sai devotee, had planned a detour to Prashanthi for the birthday celebrations. My mum was accompanying my sister and I, and we were all really excited to finally be going to the ashram. We arrived in Puttaparthi on 22 November, and with barely a few hours of sleep, we started lining up from 3am to enter the Hillview stadium, where the birthday celebrations were taking place. After standing in the line for a few hours in the rain, and then watching the sun rise, it was finally time to enter the stadium. As we were towards the front of the line, we got to sit near the front steps of the stadium. There were puddles of water on the steps and when we sat in those puddles, the colours of our Punjabis started to run. But we barely noticed it, because we were just so excited to be there.

Just before Swami entered the stadium, the rain stopped, and the clouds separated to allow a ray of sunlight through. It became the sky's spotlight shining its welcome over Swami and Sai Geetha. I felt like a Disney movie was taking place right before my very eyes! I just could not believe that I was actually seeing Swami, something I had dreamed about for many years. Sai Geetha was the most majestic and beautifully-decorated elephant and the energy of the parade, with its music and dance, was electric. It was the most beautiful sight to behold Swami, in His white robe, drive past us and get onto the stage where He sat on a silver and blue altar. After a few guest speakers and performances, it was time for Swami's discourse. But for some reason, hearing Him speak was such a high energy experience, that we all couldn't keep our eyes open. I dozed off a few times and had to coax myself to stay awake as this was God Himself speaking to us. **Swami spoke about how precious this human life was and that we should always practice love. He ended by saying how happy He was with all of us; that we would live long and prosperous lives; and that He loved us all.** It was these words, uttered by our Lord, that was the turning point for me. If Swami Himself had just said that He loved me and that He was happy with me, how could I ever not be grateful for this life and everything He had blessed me with?! He chose this life for me. He chose this body for me. So how could I ever feel like it was not good enough. Swami chose me to know Him. What more could I have asked for?! From that day on, I resolved to love the body that Swami had chosen for me, including its skin-tone. That is how my journey to Self-Love began.

All these thoughts were running through my mind as we were exiting the stadium. All of a sudden, we noticed Swami's car as it passed us by, near the exit. As I glanced up to look at Swami, He looked directly into my eyes… and into my soul. Through the window of the car, our eyes locked for a few seconds, and in those seconds, I got the confirmation I needed. He knew everything. He had chosen the best option for me, and I was going to embrace it. This life was His gift to me.

Two years later, my sister and I were blessed with the opportunity to attend the 2007 Youth Conference. It was the first time that we were travelling alone (which was shocking given that my dad wouldn't ordinarily allow us to even go to the mall alone!) Anyway, Swami gave all the Sai youth from around the world such VIP treatment that I felt like I was some sort of special soldier in His Mission. He spent time with us every day and we all felt so privileged to be there. When we returned, I became even more involved in the youth activities of the Sai organization. My self-confidence was growing every day and I could feel myself becoming the person Swami would be proud of.

Then, in 2010, I saw Swami in His Physical Form for the last time, as part of the Ubuntu pilgrimage. I had just finished university and was looking for work, when I was approached to assist with the production's choreography. I planned to just help out and had no intention of travelling to India. But as the months of ever-increasing involvement and rehearsals went by, I was still not employed (which was actually a good thing as I otherwise would never have managed the exhausting rehearsal schedule). In the end, there was no reason for me not to go to Prashanthi, and being part of the Ubuntu production turned out to be another magical blessing from Swami. I had always hoped to dance in front of Swami and Ubuntu enabled me to do so through the kids I taught. During the actual performance, I was backstage helping the dancers with their costume changes, but I did manage to sneak a few peeks of Swami's delighted face as He watched the show. After the performance, all the children and backstage crew were asked to come on stage for a group picture. As I watched Swami's wheelchair roll down the ramp towards us, stopping along the way to speak to a few kids, I stood in absolute awe. When finally, He came to the back, close to where I was standing, all I could feel was adrenaline rushing through my body. People around me started to weep, but I could just feel extreme heat, like I was standing next to a ball of fire. Swami was seated so close to me that if I put out my hand, I would touch Him. Buckets of sweat began to drip down my body. I was literally standing in God's Aura. That moment, and that picture, will be cherished forever. *(Refer: Image h)*

There is no room for self-doubt when the Lord Himself chooses you to know Him. When Swami accepted me, knowing fully who I was, that was all that matters. Today, I know He is guiding me through everything I do, and everything I experience - guiding me to live as if I were an image of Him. I have even become that thaalam player I once dreamed of becoming! If the situation is difficult, I know there is a lesson He wants me to learn.

I live my life with confidence now, because all that I see, is but a reflection of Him. Swami is my only constant.

Loving Myself means Loving Him.

PRIAR MUNIAN, 38
DUBAI, UAE

Come one, come all
See in Me yourself, for I see Myself in all of you.
You are My life, My breath, My soul.
You are all My forms.
When I love you, I love Myself.
When you love yourself, you love Me.
I separated Myself from Myself
So that I may be Myself.

Baba[8]

OM SRI SAI BHAKTI JNANA PRADEEPAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Ignites the Light of Devotion and Spiritual Knowledge

14. A CONNECTION WITH THE MASTER

It was November 2002 and, as a mere 17-year-old, I was enjoying an exceptionally fulfilling 4,5 months stay in Prasanthi Nilayam. With just a few days until Swami's 77th birthday, the ashram was teeming with devotees from across the globe. As such, I and many others had to set out earlier than usual for the morning darshan token lines. But alas, my effort appeared futile as I ended up with token 17, which placed me in a position 7 rows away from the front. I settled into my seat feeling a tad disappointed as I knew this meant little chance of interaction with the Master. How wrong I was...

Some hours later, music started to play signalling the commencement of darshan. But, this music was rather different. I'd never heard something like it before and, from the very first notes, I was completely taken in. For me, it felt ethereal, and resulted in a complete shift of my awareness towards an all-encompassing state of inner peace and bliss. I was overwhelmed by a sense of Pure Divine Love which I had never experienced before, and which can probably only be described as Nirvana-like. It overcame my being so entirely that, in contrast to how I normally am during darshan, I genuinely lost all interest in seeing the Physical Form of Sathya Sai Baba. This supremely serene melody was serving as a conduit for me to experience a sense of Oneness and Interconnectivity with everything. (I later sought out the Prashanthi Nilayam Music Coordinator and learnt from him that, this music which had essentially transported me to another realm, was in fact Traditional Chinese Temple Music).

I'm not entirely certain as to how long I remained in that state, but when I eventually opened my eyes, the Master had stopped, and was standing directly in line with me, gazing in my direction. This was quite uncommon as Swami usually walks along the darshan lines, stopping to engage with a few fortunate devotees, before promptly moving on again. So I, like everyone else, was perplexed by Swami standing motionless and staring in my direction. Nonetheless, I found myself standing up and walking forward towards Him. Then, Swami unexpectedly reached out His Hand to ask for the letters I was holding. But, given the elevated state of consciousness I had just encountered, the many letters in my hand were all mixed up, forcing me to take a few moments to separate them first. As I was doing this, Swami cracked a joke saying, **"You! Everything separate, separate."** Everyone around us smiled, including Swami and myself. But, given my OCD tendencies, I knew immediately what Swami was referring to. Although, the true profundity of that divine observation would only become clear to me decades later.

Anyway, I separated the letters accordingly. In the one hand, I held my standard 3 letters, in which I listed 3 different study options for Swami to select from as my study and career path. This was an idea I borrowed from a fellow Sai youth and for whom this plan had worked fantastically well. In my case however, over my 4,5 months stay, Swami would take all 3 letters on more than 20 different occasions! In my other hand, I held another 3 letters from devotees back in South Africa who had asked me to offer it to Swami on their behalf. As I held both sets of letters out to Swami, He blessed the letters from the other devotees by placing His right hand on them and tapping it three times. As for my 3 letters with my study choices, once again, Swami took all three! (It was only in the final weeks of my stay, and after another darshan interaction, that I would find myself unknowingly holding just one letter in my hand. This, to my mind, was the career path He had chosen for me - Teaching - albeit after months of impressing upon me that I need not limit myself to one field alone.)

After Swami took the letters, I turned around and, with my back towards Him, returned to my seat on the floor, 7 rows back. It was only after I had sat down again, that I noticed Swami actually hadn't moved an inch. He was still standing there, gazing at me. Once again, everyone around, including myself, was extremely perplexed as to what was going on. All of a sudden, a short conversation began to arise between Swami and I - a non-verbal,

telepathic conversation of sorts. Essentially, Swami asked me what I wanted. I pointed towards the interview room indicating that I wanted to have a private discussion about my personal life and its overall direction. Following His Hand gesture and sensing His permission, I once again got up and made my way through the rows of devotees, towards the Master.

As I approached Swami, He looked at me ever so deeply, almost searchingly, as if to analyse my soul. Then, He began to move His Right Hand in a circular motion, producing sacred vibuthi, which He then placed into my outstretched hand. I smiled and thanked Swami profusely for the absolutely wonderful gift He had just given me. He responded with a wide and graceful smile which I can still picture to this very day. Then, He raised His Right Hand in a Divine Blessing, before finally moving on to continue with His usual darshan routine. While walking back to my seat, friends and devotees around began to ask for a little of the manifested vibhuti, which I then shared with some of them.

A month later, I would have another most enlightening encounter, that would again involve the manifestation of Swami's Divine Vibuthi…

I was fortunate to find myself in the front row for darshan. Swami walked in my direction, then came to a halt in front of me, slightly to my left. He began talking to a tall, soft-spoken devotee from Europe, who was seated a few rows behind. Swami then began waving His Hand in that all too familiar circular motion. As fate would have it, I was positioned almost directly below that very Hand at the very moment that Swami would commence manifesting something out of absolutely nothing. I lowered my head and tilted it slightly to the right, so as to gain the best possible view of this otherworldly encounter. This is exactly what I observed: All of Swami's Fingers, including the Thumb, of His Right Hand were pressed lightly together. Then, out of the gap between the Ring Finger and Little Finger, a pure, glistening white light, similar to the appearance of bright starlight on a dark evening, emanated. That white light, in turn, appeared to have a halo of glistening yellow light, much like the first light of sunrise or the last light of sunset. Suddenly, a milky grey cloud appeared in the centre of the light. It stayed like that for a moment (for me, it genuinely felt like time was standing still, and it may very well have been). Then, all of that simply disappeared, and the only thing that remained was a perfect ball of vibuthi. It looked like a miniature moon, or a ball of wet cement, except it was dry and dust-like. It even had all those imperfect, perforated edges to it. This ball just stuck to the bottom of Swami's Hand, just hanging there, betraying all known laws of gravity. Then, Swami just grabbed it out the air, and crushed the ball in His Hand, before distributing it all to that gentleman. With a flick of His fingers, a puff of vibuthi dust emerged which, to me, seemed intentionally sent in my direction, as I sat there in wide-eyed, curious amazement.

During my stay, Swami blessed more than 50 packets of vibhuti which I would carry to darshan. But after my mother handed them all out to members of our Sai centre, family and community, I found that I was left without a single packet for myself. Perhaps it was out of pity then, or as compensation that, 5 years later, I came to be the fortunate recipient of an even greater physical treasure. An event was being commemorated at the ashram with the handing out of 108 robes to 108 youth from around the world. Through chance or destiny, I happened to be one of them. During a specially arranged darshan session, Swami walked through the rows of youth, and placed His sacred ochre robe into my hands, with an indescribable gaze that felt almost like a bridge across time. That Divine Robe is kept by my bedside always (even at this very moment as I type this).

When I take the necessary time to reflect upon my experiences with The Master, I recognise that they are rather unusual by conventional standards. Many were surreal, including the dreams in which Swami would give me the personal advice and direction that I'd sought all those years ago as a teenager. But every encounter had deep significance for me. Even my fortune of witnessing the miraculous genesis of Swami's vibuthi was important because, when Swami took Maha Samadhi, I found myself impacted by all the many questions and doubts that arose from almost every direction. My faith was tested, and tested again, and tested still. But, that

moment, when time was suspended, continues to silence all the critics and doubters, both external and internal, and it has made all the difference.

While there is still so much that I do not fully grasp or comprehend, I am cognisant of the fact that, at any given moment in time, things are a lot more interconnected than we are aware of. And that our connection to The Master started long before we were born into this lifetime. And it will persist long after our time has fully elapsed.

SAAN ZEN, 40
KZN, SOUTH AFRICA

15. THE DIVINE INSTRUCTION THAT TRANSFORMED ME

My journey towards Sri Sathya Sai Baba's teachings was not a straightforward one. While my wife's family are devoted followers of Swami, my own upbringing was not rooted in Sai Baba. Spirituality was always present in my life, but the specific path of devotion to Baba was something I only encountered through other people.

During the COVID pandemic, the world slowed down, and I found myself being drawn to spirituality with greater intensity. I began reading more spiritual texts, dedicating myself to meditation, performing morning prayers, and observing holy periods with genuine intention. Yet, despite my efforts, something was missing. It was as though I was reaching for something profound, but couldn't quite grasp it.

Due to COVID restrictions, we began as a family to watch the Thursday satsangs on YouTube. I found the Sai teachings beautiful, and the bhajans soulful, but there was still a void within me that just wouldn't go away. This sense of incompleteness mirrored itself in my work and in my personal life, leaving me feeling restless, and searching for answers. I continued to read, pray, and meditate, all in an effort to find that missing piece that would bring everything into harmony. But it felt as though I was circling around something essential, and never quite reaching it.

Then, in late 2023, Swami came to me…

It was through a vivid dream — more real than anything I had experienced in my waking life. Sri Sathya Sai Baba was seated before me, His presence radiating warmth, love, and divine authority. His gaze was steady, filled with compassion, but also with purpose. He spoke to me with directness, almost like an instruction. **"Go to satsang. And speak to your father more."**

His words echoed within me like a command, firm yet tender. It was clear that Swami was showing me the path I needed to walk. I felt an overwhelming sense of clarity and direction. When I awoke, I knew this wasn't just a dream. It was guidance from Swami Himself. I made the decision to honour His instruction, committing myself to attend satsang weekly, even when it required effort and dedication.

As the weeks went by, the transformation was undeniable. Each satsang became a source of strength, filling me with spiritual muscle and self-belief that extended into every aspect of my life. What once felt like emptiness was now brimming with purpose and connection. Through seva activities, the gap within me was being filled, and I felt more present and more connected.

My father and I always communicated on matters of common interest such as sport and politics, but never at an emotional and spiritual level. These are the things I would talk to my mother about, as I shared a closer connection with her from an early age. So after Swami's message, I made a concerted effort to firstly talk to my father more, but also to share with him Swami's message and make him a part of my spiritual awakening. As a result, my father has since shared with me that he was at a spiritual low. Together, we now read spiritual texts and talk, with books being our connecting medium. Currently, my dad is reading Swami's book, His Story. He has an affinity for Shirdi Sai Baba and has thoroughly enjoyed watching the TV series. I am currently working towards the two of us going to Shirdi and Puttaparthi together.

My journey is an ongoing one, with no end destination. But I can sense energetically that I am now on the right path. I cannot imagine missing a single satsang. It's no longer a ritual - it's my lifeline. Swami's work was what I needed all along. His instruction brought me back to my essence.

Thank you Swami for calling me to You. Your Grace has filled the void I could not fill on my own.

THRISHAAL GHELA, 46
UMHLANGA, DURBAN

16. THE FABRIC OF MY LIFE

I was never a particularly religious person, but if there is one thing that angers me, it's others denigrating Hinduism (or any religion for that matter). Unfortunately, in the mid-1990s, there were many anti- Hindu sentiments being propagated by a certain organisation. So when my cousin invited me to a discourse on Hinduism by a visiting professor from India, I accepted. Little did I realise that this was to be the first of many threads being woven that would pull me towards Him.

That afternoon I visited my cousin at his supermarket in Phoenix where I was introduced to his house guest, a Swami from the Divine Life Society. Seeing that I own a clothing factory, my cousin requested that I please make the Swami some dhotis. I happily agreed to do so, only to later realise that a dhoti is made from woven fabric, while our factory only specializes in knits. We simply did not make woven garments at all. Faced with this challenge, I asked my staff to search through all the excess fabric in our cutting room. *"Search everywhere,"* I said. *"Search under the cutting table. Look for a mustard or yellow woven fabric."* Their dumbfounded looks spoke volumes. Firstly, everyone knew we didn't carry woven fabrics, and secondly, I was not asking for black or white, I was asking for a most unfashionable colour. But, to everyone's surprise, a roll of mustard woven fabric was indeed found in our cutting room. And not a single employee could recall what it had ever been used for, if at all. We were able to make 3 woven mustard dhotis for the Swami, together with matching short and long sleeve t-shirts.

That evening, my wife Chandra and I duly went to the Stonebridge Community Hall to listen to the visiting professor's talk. But unbeknown to us, we were actually at a Thursday satsang organised by the local Sai Centre. At the end of the service, I spotted my cousin who had just closed his supermarket which is adjacent to the hall. He was talking to an official who then returned with a picture frame of Sai Baba. To my surprise, my cousin then turned to me, and gave me the frame. I was gobsmacked by this gesture because my cousin and his entire family are ardent devotees of Swami Sivananda. Nonetheless, this was the first picture of Sai Baba to enter our home and it remains to this day as the focal point of our prayer room. My cousin then asked whether I would host the same Swami from the Divine Life Society, in our new and spacious home, to which I readily agreed.

As the Swamiji entered our home, he stopped at the door and looked at an area above our double garages which I had recently enclosed with the intention of turning it into a bar, made from railway sleepers with a thatch roof and an adjoining braai area. But when the Swami remarked, *"What a lovely area to have bhajans,"* I scoffed at his pipedream. Little did I know that exactly three months later, Chandra and I would be hosting bhajans in that exact spot for the entire Ramayan week

About a month after receiving the gift of Sai Baba's photo frame, I developed the urge to see Him. It was 14 December and we were closing the factory for the Christmas holidays on 21 December. I was clearly naïve because every travel agent I called informed me that there was no availability on any flight to India leaving on 22 December or soon thereafter. Until finally, I called East West Travels where the agent asked me exactly where in India I wanted to visit. When I said Sai Baba's ashram, he then said something that I will always remember. *"Give me your phone number. If He wants you there, then there will be a seat for you."* None of the other travel agents had even bothered to ask for my phone number! The following morning, the same travel agent called me sounding very excited. *"Mr Govender, I don't know how, but I've just looked at my computer and I see that there are 2 seats available on Singapore Airlines leaving on the 22nd."*

I sat in my very first darshan of Sai Baba in the second row, feeling grateful that Swami had evidently wanted me there. So I decided that it would be nice to write Him a letter as I had heard He took letters from devotees during darshan. But as I had no writing material with me, I put the thought aside. Just then I saw a student sitting close by doing some school work, so I asked to borrow a pen and page. My thoughts flowed effortlessly onto the page, and when I was done, I folded the letter and put it into my top pocket. Suddenly I heard the music change and saw Sai Baba enter the hall. Like little children yearning for their mother's attention, I saw devotees with outstretched hands holding up letters and hoping for Swami to stop. Even if Swami walked past them, they never seemed to lose the glow and smile on their faces. I was lost in these musings and before I knew it, Swami was already standing right in front of me. He looked directly into my eyes and then at my top pocket. Only then did I remember my letter! I quickly reached into the pocket and handed my folded thoughts to the Lord.

When we returned to South Africa, we began attending the Greenwood Park Sai Centre, where I heard a call for assistance to build a regional hall in Newlands. With my experience in the architectural field and as I had just completed our four duplexes, I offered to assist. With time, and further projects, it became clear to me, that this was in fact my calling.

Since that first trip in 1995, I have been fortunate to visit Prashanthi Nilayam almost every year. Each trip yielding beautiful memories, including numerous front row darshans. In 1998, we accompanied a fellow devotee from our Sai Centre to India. After four days in the ashram, she requested that I please try to give Swami some letters on behalf of her son who was about to embark on his matric year and who needed career guidance. Sure enough, the next morning I was once again blessed with a front row seat. As Swami walked by, I stretched my arm out with the letters in my hand, and called out the son's name to Swami. He stopped and looked at me. And then, He looked at the letters. There were only three letters and usually Swami would take them all. This time however, He placed His thumb and His index finger together and began to carefully scroll through the edge of each letter, before pulling out just one. He took the one, and off He went. After darshan, I shrugged and explained to the mother that Swami had only taken one letter. But as opposed to being disappointed, she was delighted. *"Yes, yes! Swami was only supposed to take one letter,"* she exclaimed before rushing to phone her son. It was then that I learnt that her son had actually asked Swami a multiple choice question by labelling the back of each envelope with the letters A, B and C. And by selecting only the one envelope, the Lord had chosen Medicine!

Another memorable trip was the one for Christmas in the year 2000, when we took our three nieces. After our first darshan, my 5-year-old niece came running up to me saying:
"Uncle Roy, how do they put the blue lights on Swami's hair?"
"Did you see the blue lights?" I asked her.
"Yes, the blue lights on Swami's hair! How do they put the blue lights on Swami's hair?"
"Well, my child, if you have seen the blue lights on Swami's hair, then you are an old soul."
"I am not old, Uncle Roy! I am only 5!"
"It's okay, sweetheart. I'll explain it to you some day."

Well, I have not seen any blue lights on Swami's hair. But I have definitely seen the threads that He weaves in the fabric of my life. Sometimes, as in weaving, the threads are straight and run parallel. But sometimes, as in knitted fabrics, the yarn follows a meandering path. Both have their value, providing either strength or flexibility.

But every day, those threads or yarns draw me closer to Him. And that's all that matters.

ROY GOVENDER, 70
GLENASHLEY, DURBAN

17. THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

I was so angry with You
It felt like You were never really around
And I couldn't talk to You because You felt so out of reach — so intangible.
Everyone around me seemed to have these dramatic encounters with You
Burning fires, miraculous health recoveries, outpourings of vibuthi, loud signs, visions.
But I had silence
Just… silence.
I called you Swami
But even that felt far away
Your Form never resonated with me
Too old. Too male. Too unreachable.
I didn't know how to meet You where You stood — so high above me on a chair I couldn't reach.

Until someone sent me a video
A black panther, alone in the wild
It wasn't roaring or pacing. It was just there. Still, and yet undeniably powerful.
I remember staring at the screen, mesmerized.
Why did something in me feel seen by this creature?
Maybe it was the way it held itself — confident, unapologetically present, even in the shadows.
Maybe it was the quiet power it carried.
It didn't need to be loud. It didn't need to prove anything.
It just was.
And somehow, it began to feel like… You.

In my dreams, in my quiet moments of fear or uncertainty,
I would see the panther.
I didn't call it God. I didn't even know what I was doing.
But it was there,
Before my exams, before chess matches,
When I had to speak up, when I needed confidence, or a presence to hold me up in moments of sadness.
It was there like a shadow beside me — watchful, still, unwavering.
It didn't need to say much
Just enough: *"I'm here. You've got this."*

Only now, as a young woman, can I see it clearly
You were with me in every moment
When I got accepted to study my dream vet degree
When I played my final game and earned my national chess colours
Even when I felt like I had failed my exam and everything was falling apart
You were there
With that same quiet whisper
"I've got you. I'm here."

I used to hear people say, 'If you take one step toward God, He'll take a hundred toward you'.
I never understood that. It felt too simple. Too neat.
But now I see that my one step wasn't perfect. It wasn't even intentional.
It was just noticing something beautiful
Something powerful
Something that felt like safety.

That panther — You — was my step
And You, Swami, took a thousand
Not by becoming louder, but by becoming familiar
By stepping down from the pedestal, and slipping into my world, without needing to be announced.
You didn't wait for me to be ready for scripture, bhajan or form
You came as presence
As instinct
As strength
As silence.

Now, your presence is loud in my life
I feel you in every step and every breath I take
I no longer need the panther to remind me that You are near
But I will never forget that You met me where I was
And walked me home
Through the wilderness of myself.

KARMISHTA MOODLEY, 21
SOMERSET PARK, DURBAN

My Dear!

Have you got any spiritual hunger? Spiritual hunger is the ultimate meaning of every activity in life. The dissatisfaction and the restlessness that remains even after obtaining all the necessities of life show that everyone, consciously or unconsciously, does suffer from spiritual hunger and it is not appeased until the spirit within is realised.[9]

The bird with you, the Wings with Me
The foot with you, the Way with Me
The eye with you, the Form with Me
The thing with you, the Dream with Me
The world with you, the Heaven with Me
So are we free, so are we bound
So we begin and so we end
You in Me and I in You

Baba[10]

OM SRI SAI ADBHUTA CHARYAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Performs Amazing Unprecedented Acts

18. THE GREATEST MIRACLE OF ALL

My grandmother, Sobhigum Pillay, or 'Aya' as we would fondly call her, was a humble person with the most generous soul. In our eyes, she bore the traits of a legend. Aya grew up in Clairwood where people would speak of an infamous beggar with a reputation for being unkempt, stern and terrifying to all that had any interaction with him. Whenever he was spotted on the streets, people would give him a wide berth. One day, this infamous beggar knocked on the door of my grandparent's house asking for food, but instead of being terrified, Aya started to feed him on a regular basis. That was my Aya.

For a woman of that era, Aya had a very diverse outlook. She respected all approaches to God, and even had a picture of Christ at her shrine, which she would adorn with candles over Easter. When Aya heard about Sai Baba, she went out and bought herself His picture frame together with a copy of Howard Murphet's book, 'Man of Miracles'. And once she had read it, Aya was hooked.

In 1973, Aya together with my grandfather, my mum and her siblings moved from Clairwood to Grasmere Road, Silverglen. Occasionally, she would hold satsang at her house which was attended by a few local ladies. But every Thursday without fail, she would buy jalebi or some other sweetmeat to offer as prasadam. Aya was enthralled by Sai Baba and eventually made it her mission to go and see Him. After relentlessly coaxing my grandfather, he finally gave her the money to travel with a tour group that was embarking on a 3-month trip of India. This was the late 70s and it was Aya's first trip abroad at the age of 63. Shortly after arriving in India, my grandfather received a wired message from Aya requesting more money and saris. Apparently, she had given most of her money and saris away to the local Indian beggars! That was my Aya.

Unfortunately, the others in the tour group didn't understand her and were disparaging of her desire to see Sai Baba. But unsurprisingly, and only through the Lord's Will, Aya eventually got her way. Not only did she fulfil her wish to have His darshan, but she was also blessed with His padanamaskar. Aya never disclosed this to any of her family – such was her humble nature. We would come to learn of these details only after her passing, in 1982, from the very same travellers who had initially derided her quest to see Sai Baba.

Exactly 9 years after her passing, miracles began to manifest in the prayer place in her bedroom. Every week, we would hear of new manifestations - vibhuti, honey, turmeric, and candies. Slowly, our family, as well as the local community, began to awaken to the phenomenon that was Sathya Sai Baba.

Swami says that His miracles are His 'calling cards'. And true to His word, over the years, His miracles have called thousands of people - from the devotee to the curious onlooker. I have witnessed many such miracles myself – from rising mounds of vibhuti, turmeric and kumkum, to oozing honey, to the materialisation of various coloured strings. I have heard sugar candy and pink and white almond sweets make an earth-shattering noise as they emerged from some other world and exited through a glass picture frame. On one occasion, a Saturday evening, seven of us were busy cleaning the prayer room when, without warning, seven tiny pendants with Swami's picture, were sprayed on the floor all around our feet. On another occasion, a beautiful bunch of 12 large red roses, placed by a visitor at the shrine, was decorated with 12 white sugar candy sweets, each one delicately balanced in the middle of a red rose.

My father used to implore us to document all of these occurrences, but we regrettably didn't. Unfortunately, not only had we started to take the miracles for granted, but my parents and I never got to visit Prashanthi Nilayam while Swami was alive. I knew we had lost an opportunity of many lifetimes. But my eventual peace came from knowing that, perhaps for us, the miracles we had seen and experienced, were to be the boon of this lifetime.

For me, whose nature is logical, critical, and sentimental, I was fascinated by the miracles initially. But then, I turned my energy to reading. I binged on all the available literature pertaining to Swami, so that I could learn everything I could. Ironically, the first book I read was also Howard Murphet's 'Man of Miracles'. I was thirsting for knowledge about the Being that was behind it all. The miracles sparked my curiosity as a child, but they also sparked my commitment to Sathya and Dharma as an adult. Swami's teachings are my guide; and knowing that He will be there for me when I need Him most, is my comfort.

I guess we will all eventually find that it is the ability of Swami's teachings to transform people, that is actually the greatest miracle of all.

SURIE GOVENDER, 50
PHOENIX, DURBAN

19. SWEETS FROM HEAVEN

I had the rare privilege of growing up surrounded by Swami's leelas. Ever since May 1991, our family home in Grasmere Road, Silverglen, was the scene of many amazing, science-defying miracles which we were witness to. But the one very unique miracle that I personally found awe-inspiring was the materialisation of sweets, specifically sugar candy and sweet-coated nuts of the type typically used in Hindu prayers, which would be 'thrown' by Swami through a large glass picture frame of Himself, creating a very loud sound almost like glass being shattered. It was a truly surreal and phenomenal experience, one to be savoured because it did not happen all the time. Initially, the household family members would experience it at random moments, as if Swami wanted to validate a certain message which they had expressed either in the form of a private thought or silent prayer. Occasionally, these showers of sweets would occur during auspicious prayer ceremonies, but it was always extremely profound, not to mention exciting.

While as a youngster, the miracles of my family home were indeed a thrill to behold, I never once anticipated that they would also provide me much comfort and faith when I needed it most…

In August 2000, just months after recovering from an appendectomy, I fell ill once again with intense abdominal pain. For three days, I underwent a battery of tests, yet my surgeon remained perplexed by the cause of what appeared to be an acute abdomen from intestinal obstruction. My anxious parents turned to Sai Baba for help and my mum paid a visit to Grasmere Road. There, in the prayer room, she sat crying and praying for my well-being. As she did so, Swami responded by 'throwing' His sweets through His picture frame into the room where she sat. When my mother later relayed this story to me, she told me how Swami's shower of sweets had instantly allayed her fears.

What my parents were unaware of however, was that the pain I had been experiencing the previous night, had been so extreme and agonizing, that I felt I would not live to see another day. All I could do was to spend the night praying to Swami for help. When my parents left Grasmere Road that morning, with the sweets in their hand, they came straight to the hospital, where they bumped into my surgeon who advised them in haste that I needed an immediate laparotomy due to an intestinal obstruction.

Through Swami's Grace, the surgery was a success. When I was discharged from the hospital a week later, the gratitude I felt for my parents' prayers and to Swami, led me to request that I be taken first to Grasmere Road before going home. I was welcomed in the prayer room, with the tying of one of Swami's materialised strings around my wrist. As I sat relaying my ordeal to all present, I mentally prayed to Swami and asked Him,

"Swami, please shower sweets for me."

The truth is, I was mid-conversation when I made this mental request. In hindsight, I recognise it as a call for comfort after the painful ordeal I had just suffered. But when I suddenly heard a thunderous bang emanating through the glass frame of Sai Baba, I was truly shocked. Lo and behold, the very next moment, there were sweets scattered all over the carpeted floor. It was my own personal moment with Swami – one that left me in awe of His Love. Swami had literally read my mind and fulfilled my request for the sweets. Only Sai Baba has this power to defy space-time constraints and to create an artefact, in this instance sugar candy sweets, and to present it to me in my time of need, as an expression of His succour and Love for His devotees.

For the privilege of this unforgettable experience and physical healing, I am deeply humbled and grateful to Swami.

ASHENDRAN GOVENDER, 47
PHOENIX, DURBAN

"You might consider what you call 'miracles' as the most direct sign of Divinity; but, the Prema that welcomes you all, that blesses all, that makes Me rush to the presence of the seekers, the suffering and the distressed in distant lands or wherever they are, that is the real sign! It is that which declares that I am Sai Baba." [11]

OM SRI SAI ARTHI HARAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Removes Bodily and Mental Distress

20. MY LIFE'S MORPHINE

I came from a family that was steeped in temple rituals and Hindu practices. So much so, that when I married into a family of Sai devotees, I struggled with the transition which was not easy for me. Even though I would attend bhajans on Thursdays, I had my doubts about Swami being God. I was simply not accustomed to praying to a human being, especially not one that was still living! But, Swami must have felt that it was time to dispel my doubts, because in 1992, He willed that my husband and I make a trip to His ashram. It was a trip that would be life changing.

For my first darshan, I had the good fortune of sitting in the front row. The sevadals instructed all the ladies as to how we should behave when Swami approached. But all their do's and don'ts had the effect of making me very nervous. I did not know what to expect and felt overwhelmed by both the crowd and by the strict sevadals. And then… I saw Swami… I found myself beaming with joy, a joy that completely displaced all the anxiety I had been feeling a few moments before. But, as Swami approached, He began to speak in Telugu. I could not understand any of what He said, even as He stood speaking to the ladies around me. But during those few moments of close proximity to Swami, moments that felt like hours, I began to cry uncontrollably, and a surge of heat and energy flowed into my body. This direct physical experience of His Love and Divine Energy dispelled all my doubts in an instant. There and then, I knew who Swami was. He was God.

After darshan, I walked to the meditation tree where I sat quietly, trying to make sense of the inexplicable experience I had just had. If Swami's physical presence had such a profound impact on me, imagine how life could be if I embraced all of His teachings and practised it. This was the beginning of my spiritual journey inwards, and I was excited to leave the ashram and get started on my new Sai spiritual path, with greater understanding of my purpose on this earth. I left Prashanthi Nilayam with full faith that Sai Baba is God and that He would be my Protector. But I also left with the mistaken belief that life would be just blissful…

On the contrary, from that year onwards, I faced even greater challenges - from losing my first child, to my family going through major health issues, to career change, and financial drains. But throughout these challenges, the one constant was Swami's Love, which I always felt strongly. As my journey continued, Swami guided me to acknowledge my roots, which included my father's advice to always remember your prayers and pay your respects at the local temple, which I duly did. Swami also gave me my greatest blessing, my wonderful daughter. He fulfilled all my material desires and wishes, and provided ample opportunities for me to serve and to be a pillar of strength to family and friends when needed. When I felt helpless, He lifted me up, and brought people into my life to come alongside me on my path. But nothing could have prepared me for the time when Swami Himself would come alongside me…

In 2018, a clear fluid began to pour from my nose. Initially, I thought it was my sinuses, but when no medication helped, I consulted an ENT specialist only to discover that it was cerebrospinal fluid and it was being caused by a tear in the connective tissue that surrounds the brain. Being told that brain fluid is flowing out of my nostrils was absolutely shocking to me. Surgery was essential. The doctor then began to explain my options which included laparoscopic surgery through the nose, and if this was not possible, cutting through my skull if necessary. But by this point in the conversation, I blanked out and left my husband to listen further. However, I do vaguely recall speaking about Swami to the doctor, who jokingly responded by claiming to be an atheist. When I went home, I had to mentally prepare myself for major surgery early the next morning. I also had to quickly learn what it means to totally surrender to Swami.

Unsurprisingly, I couldn't sleep much. So I spent the night listening continuously to the Skanda Shasti, the

Hanuman Chalisa and other Christian healing songs sent by a friend. At 06h00 the next morning, I was being wheeled to the theatre, already very tired. However, I could hear the distinct sound of 'wheels' next to mine. Whenever my trolley bed would stop, so too did the sound of these wheels. When my trolley bed took a bend, the wheels followed. Assuming it to be the wheels of a wheelchair that was making such a loud sound, I began to wonder why the person couldn't just overtake my bed. So, I curiously opened my eyes only to see our beloved Swami in the wheelchair!

Words cannot describe the feeling that came over me - my body immediately started to relax and become calm. I shut my eyes and calmly began to recite the Gayathri mantra. When I got to the theatre, I had to sit up as the fluid was flowing down my throat when I lay down. As soon as the surgical team was ready, I was told to lie down again. But just as I did so, my heart lit up, for now standing on the right at the foot of my bed, was my Swami. When the doctor asked me, *"Are you ready?"* I closed my eyes and replied, while pointing, *"Yes, I am. My God is standing right there."*

I was in High Care for three days before being discharged following a successful procedure. However, it was only at my post-surgery visit to the doctor that I discovered how Swami had miraculously taken control of the procedure. While my doctor was examining me, he asked if I could remember what I had said before being anaesthetised. *"Yes,"* I replied. *"My God is standing by my bed."* My atheist doctor then smiled and explained what happened thereafter. He had commenced the procedure by entering through my nose and around my cheek. But the laparoscope then became stuck and couldn't go any further. After prodding it several times but failing, they began to contemplate going in from my forehead, with an incision through the skull. All of a sudden, the laparoscope appeared to develop a life of its own. It just started to move and continue on through the nostril, finding its way around the obstacle in my cheek and into the cranium. I smiled, knowing full well that could only have been my dearest Swami.

Being a Sai devotee isn't a promise of a trouble-free life. Each and every one of us has a karmic path to follow, one where painful lessons sometimes need to be learnt. But having Swami in our lives is like having morphine - the pain is still there, but one's experience of it is muted. My path has taught me never to lose my faith, not even in one's darkest moments. Swami's Grace is Infinite, and He knows what is best for us.

Peppered in between all the trials, Swami has also blessed me with many joys in this life. For these, and for the opportunity of choosing Him as my Guru and God, I am eternally grateful.

URVASI PILLAY, 58
GREENWOOD PARK, DURBAN

21. FAITH LIKE SUPERGLUE

I have two sons whom I love more than life itself. It's a love only a mother can understand. But so too is the pain a mother feels when one of her children is suffering – suffering with an affliction so deep, and potentially so dark, that you become afraid. That is how I felt.

My younger son is a wonderful child who reminds me so much of my dad. Many years ago, he became a vegan and would teach maths to disadvantaged children – such is the testament to his character. In his first year at university, where he was studying for a B.Sc., he received the Dean's Commendation. But in 2020, the year of the global pandemic, everything started to fall apart.

My son, who enjoyed face-to-face interaction, brainstorming, and debates with his lecturers and peers, could not cope with online studies. In the second semester of his second year, he deregistered from university. We witnessed a dark cloud move over our normally bright and sunny child, and we had no clue as to how to stop it.

He stopped speaking to any of us. He lost weight because he wouldn't eat – at least nothing wholesome that I tried to prepare for him. He rarely emerged from his room. I enlisted the help of fellow Sai devotees, respected elders from various religious movements, and social workers. But when they would come home to speak to him, he was just plain rude, silent, and detached. We felt powerless to do anything.

The strain on my family was unbearable. With my husband and I not working, my elder son tried to get his brother to join him at his workplace. This worked intermittently for short periods, but the 20-year-old would soon be back, and moping around the house. Whenever I had to leave, I would pray to Swami: *"Please, please, protect my son; don't let him do anything stupid."*

Throughout this ordeal, I stuck to Swami like superglue. I prayed constantly, but I also fought with Him constantly. Our relationship was a rollercoaster – well, my part of it anyway! I would go to bed saying to Him, *"I'm not talking to You anymore. I'm on strike."* But then I would get up the next morning saying, *"Good morning Swami. Thank you for waking me up."* No matter how difficult it became, my faith never wavered. Sometimes I would even issue Him with a challenge: *"Go ahead. If this is about testing my faith, You can give me some more, because I am never letting go of You."*

Eventually, a friend suggested I get a particular psychic/exorcist to come and bless my house. Not believing in these kinds of things, I surrendered it to Swami. This psychic, who is usually in high demand, had only one available slot to come to my home – the day of my son's birthday! I took this as a sign from Swami. The man performed the prayer and removed the negative energies that were seemingly in existence.

But at the end of this process, I issued Swami with a final notice: *"That's it!"* I said. *"I am not doing anymore. This is now the last straw. I am handing over the care of my son to You, and only You."*

A month later, my baby boy emerged from his room, and back into the Light. For four years, it felt like He had walked through the valley of the shadow of death. He began to talk with us and eat with us again. My son is now 24 years old and is applying to study again. And this mum is so eternally grateful for the Grace of Sai.

Only God can understand the pain of a mother. I guess because every day we put Him through the same pain. But I know that the Divine Mother will never let us down, so long as we hold on tight – like superglue!

ANONYMOUS, 52
DURBAN

"If I have any vow, it is this; to relieve distress, to make all men happy everywhere, happy in body, mind, and spirit." [12]

Beloved child,

Realise the Heaven within you and all at once all the desires are fulfilled, all the miseries and sufferings are put to an end. Feel yourself above the body and its environments, above the mind and its motive, above the thought of success or fear. The great cause of suffering in the world is that people do not look within.

With Love

Sri Sathya Sai Baba [13]

OM SRI SAI APANNIVARINE NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Removes Calamities

22. WAKE UP!

It was a cold and windy night, so I double-checked that the windows and doors were closed and locked before going to bed, which is a routine habit. It was around 22h00 and I was tired. Both the children and my husband were already sound asleep. I dozed off pretty quickly and before long was in deep sleep.

Suddenly, I heard a voice. It was a clear and commanding voice: **"Wake up! Lock the shower bathroom door!"** It was the voice of Sai Baba. I did not see Him, but I heard Him, and I felt Him distinctly.

I woke up and thought that my mind was playing games with me, so I attempted to brush it off. But still I felt unsettled. I went to both the kids' rooms and found them to be sound asleep. I tried to go back to sleep myself, but was restless. So I got up and did exactly as I was instructed - I went to the passage and locked the shower bathroom door. But it was hard not to think that I had imagined it or that I might be going crazy. All was still very quiet in the house. So I went back to bed and soon fell asleep.

A few minutes later, my 16 year old daughter came rushing into our room in a panic. She shook us up, and in a loud whisper, she told us that she could hear someone in the ceiling of her room. I tried to brush her off by saying that it was windy and cold, but she was insistent. I recognized that this was unusual behaviour for her because she is usually a sound sleeper. So we went into her room and heard what sounded like something shuffling on the roof. Then we noticed that the ceiling was being cut, and bits of sawdust were falling down from it!

I immediately called my husband, and my young son woke up and pressed the panic alarm. We ran out to our front door and our tenants, on hearing the alarm, rushed to our place to assist. While we were trying to locate the intruder, he suddenly leapt off the roof. For a moment, we stood face-to-face with a tall, shirtless man, who was as dark as the night, and who looked at us with steel in his eyes. In that fraction of a second, he seemed to calculate his odds and before anyone could react and grab hold of him, he turned and jumped off the patio, across the yard, and over the boundary wall. In one swift leap, he disappeared into the darkness.

Needless to say, we were all shaken by the experience. I then told my family about hearing Swami's voice earlier on. We have four bathrooms in our home, and Baba was very specific about locking the 'shower bathroom door'. Upon examining that particular bathroom, we saw that the little hatch door to the ceiling above it, was open. The intruder had clearly attempted his entry into our home through this bathroom, but with me locking the door, I had foiled his plan. He was then forced to make his entrance above my daughter's bedroom. But fortunately, the sounds he made caused her to wake up.

I don't like to think about what could have happened that fateful night in 2012 when an unknown man with ill-intent tried to enter our home while my family was fast asleep. All I know is that Swami kept us safe from harm. That is all that matters. And I am forever grateful.

To this day I can still hear and feel the moment my Precious Baba spoke to me in order to protect us. Swami usually says, **"Call Me and I will be there."** In our case, we didn't even call Him, but He was still there for us. **"Why fear when I am here"** – indeed!

NERISHA GOORCHURAN, 58
DURBAN NORTH

23. OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH

The year was 1983. It was a cold winter's evening, the sun was beginning to set, and I was returning from a funeral home in Parlock. I was driving in the fast-lane on the N2 freeway, southward-bound. As I approached Spaghetti Junction (an interchange of multiple glide-offs and flyovers), I noticed an oncoming vehicle on my lane. It was travelling in the complete opposite direction. There were cars in the lane directly to my left, and a metal barrier to my right. There was no way to avoid this oncoming car…

A fatal crash was imminent…

All I could do was to call out to Swami. *"Swami! Swami! Swami!"*

Suddenly, I felt my car being lifted up…

It crossed the metal barrier that was on the right hand-side, and landed with a thud, inside the yellow line, on the northward-bound side of the freeway. The car, still south-facing, then came to a standstill.

I was completely shaken up. But I was also very grateful to Swami. His Grace even extended to sending an ambulance which was passing by at the exact time. The paramedics stopped just to make sure that I was ok, before radioing the police and informing them what had happened .

The following day, I went to the police station to report the incident. The constable then informed me that the man driving the offending car had been driving while drunk, with both his wife and child in the car. He had taken a wrong turn on to the freeway and caused absolute mayhem, crashing into 20 other cars, before eventually coming to a standstill.

I instantly recognized Swami's Hand in delivering me from my karma.

Whenever I think about this incident, I give silent thanks to our Lord Sai for saving me from the jaws of death.

DR RAJEN COOPPAN, 69
MORNINGSIDE, DURBAN

24. SAVED BY A VISION

I was raised in the multicultural communities of Mayville and Chatsworth at a time when neighbours were family and fences were never boundaries. My family subscribed to the tenets of Hindu Dharma and I was exposed to many local prayer groups. At the time of my marriage to my gorgeous wife Deshni, I had already started on my path toward Sai, ensuring that both my children were enrolled in the Balvikas programme. However, my devotion was unfortunately scattered, and I would still alternate between the local temples and the different Sai centres. But one Friday afternoon in September 2006, that was about to change...

I was employed as the Quality Engineer at a manufacturing engineering company in Pinetown. My role was

to assess all incoming components and to conduct inspections of all outgoing parts and finished goods. That Friday, I was about to inspect a few traction motors, each weighing about 4 tonnes, and being held up by a crane 2 metres in the air. As I was performing a detailed inspection of the underside for possible cracks or bolt holes, I spotted our foreman at the far end of the workshop. He appeared to be shouting and waving. As the workshop is a noisy place, I thought perhaps he was waving at someone else. But then, I saw that he was actually running towards me, still shouting. Then, his words rang through my ears, *"Singh, get out of the way!"* I quickly moved aside. In the very next instant, the crane gave way, and this 4,5 tonne locomotive motor came crashing to the ground causing an earthquake-like sound. The entire workshop came to a grinding halt.

Realising that I had just been saved from certain death, I questioned my foreman - how did he know that the crane was about to lose its hold on the motor? He then said something that I still don't understand, even after all these years. My foreman, who was actually a Ram devotee and a member of a Ram bhajan group said, *"Swami! I had a vision of Swami."* He then asked me if I had ever visited Sai Baba. When I replied that I had not, he suggested to me that this incident was perhaps a calling to do so. I decided there and then to do exactly that! The following week, I approached the company MD for an extension on my leave based on the fact that I wanted to spend time with Sathya Sai Baba in India. Since the company usually closed around the 23rd December, I knew that my request to go off a week earlier was more likely going to be denied by our strict MD. But, quite unexpectedly, when I went to his office, he was more curious about who this Sai Baba was. He approved my leave without hesitation and told me that I was clearly saved by a miracle because they could not find any fault with the crane. I believe Swami acted through my foreman to save my life that day - a day that still gives me goose bumps when I recall it.

Our trip to the ashram on 16 December was a most incredible one where we were blessed with beautiful darshans of Swami, some of which were very close. He even accepted a letter of mine, in which I had written: *"Swami, I would like to see more miracles in my life."* Silly me had clearly forgotten that sometimes those miracles can be associated with much drama…

After leaving Prashanthi, our family headed to Kashmir at the request of my mother-in-law who longed to see the mountainous region which was then open to visitors. We spent Christmas in a snow-covered Kashmir and enjoyed many fun-filled activities such as skiing and horse-riding. On our way back to Delhi, we visited about 15 temples and holy sites. I thought to myself: how fortunate and privileged we are to be enjoying such a wonderful first trip to India! I should have touched wood at this thought or crossed my fingers or something, because shortly thereafter, on our final leg from Delhi to Mumbai, my mother-in-law passed out cold on the flight. She appeared to have no pulse, no breath, nothing.

With two kids aged 5 and 9, we became panic-stricken. The flight attendants quickly asked if there was a doctor on board the plane. When a gentleman came to assist us, his cursory diagnosis was that my mother-in-law had fallen into a diabetic coma. Given her extensive list of chronic conditions and medications, he was helpless to do anything. When we landed, an ambulance was brought onto the runway at Mumbai International Airport and Deshni went off with her mum to Jaslok Private Hospital.

After collecting our luggage, the kids and I followed in a taxi, and we chanted all the way as my mother-in-law was rushed to the ICU. At the same time, we kept receiving calls from relatives back in South Africa, because Deshni's aunt had sadly just passed away. Needless to say, this made us all the more stressed and anxious, but I continued to chant *"Aum Sai Ram"* in my mind. Suddenly, the doctors and nurses came running out to say that my mother-in-law had miraculously come out of the coma, and that we must be thankful to whichever God we were praying to. My mother-in-law ended up needing a pacemaker and some other procedures done, but fortunately we were all allowed to spend the days in the hospital with her, before finally returning home on 9 January.

So yes, when I asked to see more miracles in my life, that was not exactly what I had in mind! Still, we were truly grateful to Swami.

His Love and Protection is all one can ask for.

SANJAY SINGH, 57
AVOCA, DURBAN

25. HE PARTED THE SEA LIKE MOSES

On 4 January 1987, our family gathered at La Mercy Beach in KZN for a picnic. It was a beautiful sunny day, and we were all having a wonderful time. While my husband Krishna and our children swim very well, I have always been afraid of the water.

My cousin, let's call her Kay, introduced us for the first time to her husband, who we shall call Roy. He seemed to be a little shy and spent much of the time playing on a kiddie's plastic raft. Nevertheless, with much to eat, we all enjoyed a hearty lunch together. Then we sat on the shore chatting, watching the waves ebb and flow, and just enjoying our time together. Roy, however, went back to the raft.

At around 14h00, all the children decided to get out of their wet swimming clothes to play a game of Rounders. So they left to the cars to change, accompanied by a few of the adults. Only Krishna, Kay, and I, were left sitting on the beach, talking.

Suddenly Kay looked to the ocean and saw that her husband, who had previously been on the kiddie's raft, was now deep in the water, waving one hand. She exclaimed: *"Oh my God, Roy cannot swim."* Krishna got up and immediately swam into the water to help Roy. I reassured Kay that Krishna is a good swimmer and would get Roy out. I walked closer to the water's edge, all the time watching Krishna go deeper and deeper into the ocean in his efforts to reach Roy and get him out to safety. But when Krishna reached Roy, they were both taken by the current, beyond the breakers.

Lots of people began to gather, unable to help in any way, and feeling very sorry for us. I looked at the two men, and all I could see were their heads bobbing up and down in the water. By then, I found myself in a trance-like state, not aware of what people were saying to me. It felt like I was one with Swami. The only words that came out of my mouth were: *"Swami, please don't let me down. Swami, please don't let me down. Swami, please..."*

Then, right in front of my eyes, and the many people watching, Krishna and Roy bobbed right up, a path appeared in the ocean, and both men walked right out, with the ocean closing in a churning motion behind them. I imagine it was much like the way Moses parted the sea.

At the time Krishna never believed in Swami. He used to ridicule me for praying to a man. But when he got out, his first words to me were: *"Your Sai Baba is God!"* He said that he had given up hope of coming out of the ocean alive, and that all he thought of was that he was never going to see his family again. When suddenly, he felt a rock beneath his feet. They were picked up and, to this day, Krishna is still unable to explain how they walked out. Both the men were exhausted and just sat on the sand in shock, wondering how they could possibly have fought against a current that was taking them deeper into the ocean. It was just not possible – that is, not humanly possible.

Swami, however, was just so wonderful. He sent our children to get changed so they were not at the scene at the time. If they had been there, they would definitely have swum in after their dad, especially our teenage boys. Swami saved them by sending them away. Everyone that gathered there to watch two men drowning, witnessed a miracle that day.

From that day on, Krishna has become a staunch devotee of Sai Baba, following His teachings implicitly. In March that year, Krishna's work saw us relocate to Johannesburg, where 3 years later, in 1990, we started the Kensington Sai Centre in our home. Every week, Krishna and I would provide supper for the congregation of 45 people after satsang as well as perform Narayana Seva, all on his salary.

Swami says: "**You take one step towards Me. I will take a hundred towards you.**" Everything is through Swami's Divine Grace.

PRAKASHNE (72) AND KRISHNA (83) NAIDU
KENSINGTON, JOHANNESBURG

"Ensuring the safety of the devotee is one of the tasks I have taken on."

When His Name is called by anyone from anywhere, at any time, from the depth of the heart, He HAS to manifest Himself and render rescue.[14]

OM SRI SAI ARTHATHRANA PARAYANAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Saves the Afflicted and Distressed

26. IT'S OK

When a young woman gets married, she usually does so filled with joy and hope – in anticipation of the life she is about to build together with her partner. But as I lay in the hospital bed, being questioned by police officers, I realised that our life of 16 years, as a couple, and as a family of three children, had just exploded.

Hope had long left me….

I was an abused woman, whose adulterous husband had just hit her with a golf club knocking her senseless. But that was the explosion I needed. Although it wouldn't amount to much. Amongst a litany of court proceedings, advocate fees, and 'lost' dockets, no charges could be brought against my husband.

But all that matters is that he had left. I made sure that from that point onwards, I would stand on my own, as a single mother. That was the miracle wrought by Swami in my life.

You see, like so many women in the Support Group, it's the hope that makes you stay. Hope that he will change; hope that it won't happen again; hope that it will all get better. That's why women stay in abusive relationships. That, and the financial dependence. We lived a comfortable life materially – I used to drive a Mercedes Benz. Now, he was using the bills, even school fees, as leverage.

But there was no way back for me – only forward. And forward meant closer and closer to Swami.

I first learnt of Sai Baba when I was a teenager. I was so drawn to Swami that my mother took me to see Him as soon as I finished matric. But, like so much of myself, I lost that connection when I got married. My husband would even scupper my attempts at fasting on a Thursday. *"How stupid can you be to pray to a man,"* he would say.

But even though I let go of Him, I know He never once let go of me.

Just before the 'explosion', I had begun to listen to and chant the "Aum" regularly. I believe this is what gave me the strength to do what I needed to do. Even though I had some really bad days, I knew I still had to get up and be a mother. It was by constantly chanting, and talking to Swami, that I endured the backlash I faced, when I initiated the divorce proceedings.

Swami also sent angels to help me every step of the way. An angel to help me double-park when I needed to go into government buildings in the CBD; an angel to fix my stalled car; an angel to find me a new house; an angel to pick me up when I was down. I have learnt that we always have a choice: we can curse the darkness; or we can be the light. I chose to be the light. Over all material comforts, I chose my children. Over reputation and status, I chose peace. And I was only able to do so, because of the ordinary angels that supported me and lifted me up when I stumbled. Together, these ordinary angels, performing everyday miracles, had extraordinary impact.

The first angel in my life has to be my eldest child, my precious daughter, who is now 20 years old. She was my rock in the worst of times. In the year she did her matric, 2022, I suffered a stroke. Believing it to be just a severe headache, I took some pain medication and went to sleep. The following morning, I pushed myself through the usual Monday routine, dropping the children at school, and then going to work. But with my speech slurred, and my PC screen blurry, something was definitely wrong. So I drove myself to the hospital, chanting and

talking to Swami all the way. It was only the following day that an MRI confirmed the stroke. *"Swami, I have 3 children. You need to take me back home,"* was all I said to Him.

Three days later, I was discharged from the hospital. Other than slight memory loss, and some speech and hand defects, there was no major stroke impact. However, I had to spend the next 6 months at home, undergoing occupational and speech therapy. Quite unexpectedly, this proved to be a time of light, not darkness. I got the opportunity to spend quiet, quality time with my children. I got the opportunity to do seva by making sandwiches for the poor. I got the chance to watch the sunrise and to spend time in nature. I got the chance to listen to bhajans and Hillsongs, to lift my spirits and to let go of all my pain. It was this same stroke that catalysed my regular attendance at satsang and motivated me to help others, as much as I can, wherever I can.

As for my daughter, a person who at such a young age had to endure so much, she is a vegan who loves nature and the animal world. When we struggled to pay her UNISA fees, our Lord did not forsake her. Not only did He bless her with a scholarship to study abroad, but He also approved her student visa, when all others were having theirs declined.

I have learnt that when Swami ordains a path, He also opens it up. It was ordained that I marry, and live the life I did. I have never once questioned why. I just know that everything had to happen the way it did.

Like one year ago, when we found our new house. It was difficult for me to leave the house in which my three children were born, but with constrained finances, I had to make the difficult decision to downsize. After searching endlessly, I asked Swami to lead us to the right place for our family. And then I found it - at 7am on a Thursday morning, and through an agent whom I have never met before, but who gave me a hug as soon as she saw me. Walking through the simple, yet still unaffordable house, I felt: *"I think my children will be comfortable here."* The owner emigrated in a smooth process, and I went from wanting to rent, to making a purchase. In the same month that we were moving into our new home, my daughter was leaving to study abroad.

Nobody ever promised that life would be easy. Sometimes it is super tough. And sometimes you get a little respite. But every time, you have to have faith. Because you have to endure. I've most likely had to go through all that I have, due to karma from previous lives. And that's ok.

Because something was missing in my life anyway, and it needed to be filled.
Because I needed to find my true nature again.
Because I needed to get closer to Swami.

ANONYMOUS, 45
DURBAN

27. FROM ONE LIFESAVER TO ANOTHER

My son Nivendra was a lifesaver. From the time we moved to Isipingo Beach in 1972, when the boys were 5 and 7 years old, Niven and his older brother Shailendra were always outside playing. As they grew, they would join their local Muslim friends to play soccer and cricket, and eventually they even became qualified lifesavers. Nobody foresaw the tragedy that would unfold.

On 4 April 1988, Easter Monday, Niven and his friend went for their usual soccer training. But as it was a public holiday, their trainer didn't pitch up, so the two boys went down to the beach by the Island Hotel. Being strong swimmers, the bad weather did not deter them, and they both sat on the wall of the tidal pool, chatting.

But the waves were 1,5m – 2m high, and one of those waves evidently took the boys by surprise. They were washed off the wall and into the sea. While his friend managed to grab onto a pole, Niven was pulled away by the currents. A nearby fisherman witnessed the whole incident and called for help.

Even after hiring a search-and-rescue helicopter, we never found my beloved son's body.
He was 20 years old.

I was not a devotee of Sai Baba then. But a friend of mine used to attend the Sai centre in Malakazi and they came to sing bhajans at our home. When called upon, I did not even know how to turn arthi for Sai Baba. But slowly, and driven by the type of sadness that cannot be put into words, I began to attend the weekly satsangs.

My husband's cousin who was a Sai devotee and who used to visit us almost every day then wrote a letter to Sai Baba. In a bid to seek some kind of solace on my behalf, she sent it with another devotee travelling to Puttaparthi. A few weeks later, that devotee reported back to us: As Swami took the letter, and without opening it, He said, **"He is with Me. And his family will come to see Me soon."**

After the one-year memorial ceremony for my son, we travelled to see Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in Prashanthi Nilayam. It was during the afternoon darshan session when my eyes caught their first glimpse of Swami, as He floated out of His residence. In that moment, I was overwhelmed with tears.

We spent two weeks at the ashram, praying and healing. Shailendra received Swami's padanamaskar and went on to become an active Sai devotee. And since then, I have steadily got stronger. By engaging in regular seva and through the guidance and comfort that only dreams of Swami can provide, my faith in God has been restored.

For He has become my Lifesaver.

PREMILLA MAHARAJ, 82
LA LUCIA, DURBAN

"As a fish is drawn towards the rod by a worm, I drag you towards Me by means of some ache or pain or loss or distress. I then win your loyalty to the discipline. I encourage and lead you on by the hand toward the goal of the human individual: the realisation of his Divinity."[15]

OM SRI SAI SHIRDI SAI MOORTAYE NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Incarnation of Shirdi Sai

28. WRONG DOOR – RIGHT ENTRANCE

As a young child, I was intrigued by the phenomenon of Shirdi Sai Baba, whose enigma was shrouded in the magic of jelly-like 'rotis' that grew in scented rose water. My family and I were recipients of this prasadam shared with us by others, but while the conscious mind attributed it to a magical blessing, we failed to recognize that this was indeed His 'calling card'. The memory soon faded, tucked deeply in the recesses of my mind, and the years rolled on.

When we eventually entered the Sai organization, and we began to learn of the Sai Trinity, my fascination with Shirdi Sai Baba slowly resurfaced, like a favourite sweet to be savoured, lest its sweetness be forgotten. What was intriguing to me though, was that my 2-year-old daughter always had the habit of taking her scarf, sometimes even a pillowcase, and wrapping it around her head in the very fashion Shirdi Baba wore his kafni. She would refer to Him as her 'Shirr' Baba.

In 2007, we were blessed to travel with a group of our friends to Shirdi. As we exited the motorways of Mumbai, and approached the rural roads of Nashik, the city gave way to awesome agricultural landscapes. Men sat in clusters playing cards while women, adorned in colourful saris, carried baskets filled with bricks and stones on their heads. We were so immersed in the beauty of our surroundings that we failed to notice the imminent dangers around us. It was only when our taxi driver stopped to cover his Andhra Pradesh number plates with mud from the roadside, that we realised we were in Uttar Pradesh and that tensions were brewing between the states over water issues. An alternate route taken through a local village, soon snaked its way into hillocks and a sea of orange flags carried by pilgrims as they chanted the name of Sainath Maharaj. With bhajans reverberating, the atmosphere was electric. The sudden burst of music and singing nourished our weary souls. We learnt that these pilgrims make the journey from Mumbai to Shirdi on foot as part of their penance. Upon our arrival, we found throngs of devotees all over the place, and being unversed in the nuances of the Holy Land, we soon got lost. However, what our group of naïve spiritual aspirants lacked in information, protocols, and patience, we certainly made up for in our desire to have the Lord's darshan.

My husband, daughter and I, together with a friend, then found ourselves separated from the rest of the group. But our attention was quickly drawn to a policeman, busy ushering people out of a building. Only then did we realise that we were actually standing at the Exit of the Shirdi samadhi. Four intrepid travellers looked at the policeman with forlorn eyes, egging him on to let us through, only to receive a fierce gaze in response. My husband continued to gesture for him to please let us through, but his deep penetrative look held us at bay. Fortunately, the guard's resolve soon melted, and he quickly removed the barricade to let us in. We scampered through like excited children, knowing full well that we were walking against the flow of exiting devotees. As we turned the corner, Shirdi Baba's samadhi rose like a dolphin riding through the waves. It towered above us in all its magnificent glory. The brightness of His Eyes was like a million suns, whose radiance floated throughout the room. The intricate weaves of gold and silver caressed each fold of His robe. Fresh flowers, garlands, and sweets adorned the shrine. Time and space stood still… and I stood riveted to the spot, savouring the beauty of this extraordinary darshan. I knew then, as I know now, that my connection with Shirdi Baba has spanned over many lifetimes and explains why I have always resonated with Him. The priests eventually spurred us on, and we were able to get our blessings and make our way to our friends.

This experience was the foundation of my journey within the Sai organization. It was preparation for the transformation that was yet to come. When we returned, I happily immersed myself in the warmth and love of the Durban North Sai Centre. As a fledgling centre, we were all intimately involved in trying to steer the centre in the right direction. While it was a huge learning for all of us, I did not recognize it as the beginning of my own spiritual journey, with Swami leading the way.

The time soon came for a new chairperson and our small band of devotees suggested that I take on the role. My apprehension knew no bounds, as I believed I was the least capable candidate to lead this enthusiastic group. My leadership skills were limited to the noisy and chaotic secular world, which was in sharp contrast to the tranquility of Swami's organization and leadership. I was also a mother of a young daughter and committed to my work as an educator. As a result, I was reluctant to take on this responsibility and prayed to Swami for His guidance.

A fortnight later, I had the most amazing dream of Swami who was dressed in robes that flowed and dazzled under the incandescent moonlight. His distinctive hair felt feathery and light, while His face seemed suffused in a golden glow. Strapped around His shoulder was a guitar which was lined with a string of fairy lights. In dreams there are no words, but the mind communicates the thoughts of each other. Swami slowly pointed His finger to me and said, **"You! Chairman."** Even with dreams the monkey-mind can stalk you, and thus, I let my mind create doubt in me. Perhaps Swami had communicated: *"You? Chairman? (you can't be serious!)"* After all, the evidence was there - Swami had held a guitar with fairy lights. And everyone knows music is not my forte – I do not know how to sing, timing eludes me, and my clapping is out of sync!... Or could the dream have meant that music was the opening for spiritual awakening, and that I actually do have the ability to lead the Centre?

With Swami by my side, and with the strong support of the devotees, I eventually accepted the cherished role. Because I concluded that the privilege of being Chairperson, together with music and bhajans, they were probably like that Shirdi Exit door – it was my way in!

Today, I am ever so grateful to Swami who has nursed, nourished and navigated my path.

MANJUSHA GOVENDER, 60
DURBAN NORTH

29. PRAYERS FOR MY PARENTS

My mother, Parvathy Ramkaran, was a devout Hindu woman whose compassion and love knew no bounds. She prayed regularly and performed all the Hindu rituals with great devotion. Everyone who visited us, friends, family and work colleagues, enjoyed her fabulous cooking and warm hospitality. However, my mum's knowledge about Sai Baba or the Sai Trinity was extremely limited.

In 2005, she was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 74. As she was the first in our family to suffer from the dreaded disease, we had little knowledge of it, and so we consulted with others who had suffered similar forms of cancer. One such person was my brother-in-law. He would often discuss the side effects with us and what we could do to help make mum more comfortable, especially as the cancer had progressed and become very aggressive.

With my mum growing increasingly weak and spending more time in hospital, the oncologist advised us that a bone marrow biopsy was necessary. He described the procedure in very broad terms, so I consulted my brother-in-law as he had undergone the same procedure. His vivid description gave me chills. He said the procedure was so excruciatingly painful that he cried and screamed so loud that the whole ward could hear him. He described hearing the bone fragments breaking as they drilled into the bone to extract a sample of his bone marrow. While local anaesthesia numbs the skin and surrounding tissues, the bone itself cannot be

numbed. My heart sank as I knew my mum would never to be able to bear that kind of pain. She was already so feeble and weak that she could barely speak. I was beside myself with worry, and tried to cancel the procedure, but the oncologist insisted that it had to be done.

So I turned to my only source of hope - I prayed fervently to Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba. I would visit my mum every day in the hospital, chanting the Gayathri mantra while mixing vibhuti with water, and then giving it to her to drink through a straw. While sitting at her bedside, I would do rounds of Japa and ask Swami to show compassion and mercy. I just could not witness my mum going through this painful procedure.

The dreaded day arrived, and I probably spent the entire morning crying, thinking about what my mum must be experiencing. But as I walked into the hospital room that afternoon, I was astounded to find my mother sitting up in bed, looking bright and cheerful. In fact, I had not seen her look so good in more than a month. She was also unusually vocal and able to hold a long conversation with me. I was completely bewildered by her promising state of health after such a painful procedure.

When I questioned her about how she had coped with the pain, she retorted, "*What pain? I had no pain.*" She then explained that a man had entered the hospital room and told her not to be afraid. He said that he would hold her hand throughout the procedure and that she would not feel any pain. I was sceptical about my mum's story, so I asked her to describe this person. Her description did not match that of Sathya Sai Baba, so I was even more intrigued. Who could this man have been? Just to make sure, I took out a few pictures of Swami that I normally carry with me in my handbag and showed them to her. As she looked through them, she suddenly exclaimed, "*That's Him! That's the person who was here.*"

My mum was pointing to a picture of Shirdi Sai Baba, whom she had never seen or heard of before! For reasons I will never know, it was Shirdi Sai Baba who responded to my prayers, and showered His Infinite Grace on my mother, before departing without a trace. My mother eventually succumbed to the cancer at the age of 76. Even though her passing was very painful for me, I will forever be grateful to Swami for the compassion and mercy He showered upon my mother that day. Have no doubt - God hears our prayers, especially the prayers for our Mata. And our Pita…

My father, Ramsaran Ramkaran, was an educator and a philanthropist, who would pay school and university fees for many people beyond our family. Initially, he was cynical about Sai Baba and would taunt his brother-in-law, an ardent Sai devotee, who used to travel from Glencoe to Durban to attend Sai meetings. But we eventually convinced my parents to travel with a group of us to Puttaparthi. Having done so, I became concerned about my father's ability to adjust to life at the ashram because he was a regular smoker, and smoking was strictly prohibited at the ashram. So I prayed to Swami to please help my father as I knew this was going to be very difficult for him. Once again, and through means I will never know, Swami showered His Infinite Grace on my father. Not only did he not smoke a single cigarette at the ashram, but he never lit another cigarette ever again! My father returned home a changed man and led the rest of his life extolling Swami's virtues, before eventually passing at the age of 84.

I feel blessed to have had the parents I did. But equally, I feel blessed to have been able to play a small part in pointing them towards the Avatar of this Age. When the Kali Yuga Avatar has always reminded us that our first and foremost duty is to our mother and father, how can He not respond to a heartfelt prayer.

Have no doubt - God hears our prayers.

DR INDERA BAIJNATH, 59
DURBAN NORTH

"Though the Shirdi body and this body are different, the person in the body (dehi) is the same; and so, I recognise and reward all who come to either place.

This selfless Divine Love is My distinctive mark, not the creation of material objects or of health and happiness..." [16]

OM SRI SAI SHAKTHI PRADAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who bestows Strength and Energy

30. MY SON

Between the age of 25 to 29 years, I suffered eight miscarriages. The day of the D&C following my last miscarriage, was also my birthday. The nurses at City Hospital, who by now knew me very well, tried to cheer me up with a birthday cake. But nothing could take away from the devastation I felt. My doctor had just told me that, not being able to carry to full-term, it was medically impossible for me to have children. My world had just come crashing down upon me.

I came from a family that was more ritualistic than spiritual. As a result, I was always searching for answers. I would attend satsang hosted by various spiritual organisations in my quest for meaning, before eventually settling into the Ramakrishna movement in Chatsworth. But when I got married, I moved to Parlock, and found myself yearning to attend bhajans once again. One day, during my lunch break in town, I saw some girls walking down the street with ash on their foreheads. Upon questioning, I was invited to join them at Joy Ma's Sai Centre in Prince Edward Street. From the moment I walked into the warm and welcoming office, with its simple shrine, I had the overwhelming sense of having finally arrived. It was here that I was pointed to the ashram in Centre Road Parlock, where I would eventually become a regular, and where I would beg Swami for His intervention.

At my post-op exam, my devout gynaecologist said to us: "*I am just a doctor. But God can perform a miracle.*" He advised us to fast and to pray to Lord Ganesha on Saturday. My husband Basant was a musician, and not a religious man. He believed in a Higher Power to which he connected through music. But he also yearned for a son, so that Saturday, he did indeed fast and pray to Lord Ganesha. As for me, I poured my heart out into a 3-page letter to Swami. "*If you really are God, you will give me a child. Please bless me to be a mother,*" I wrote. "*I am happy to accept any child, but for my husband's sake, please bless us with a son,*" I added. Then, I put the letter into an envelope; I sealed it; I signed my name over the seal; and I covered the signed seal with cello tape! The following Thursday, I unobtrusively left my impenetrable little letter at the Centre Road shrine, and tried to get on with my life.

I was not a very independent woman. I was naïve, I couldn't drive, I didn't even know the price of a loaf of bread. I was totally reliant on Basant, who cared for my every need. One evening a few weeks later, when Basant and I were returning from his band rehearsals, I tripped and fell. Although not injured, he rushed me to the local GP, who suspected that I was actually pregnant. Trying not to get our hopes up, we got a standby appointment with my gynae the next morning – a Thursday. I cried when he pronounced, "*Your God has created a miracle. You are 4 weeks pregnant.*" While Basant proudly told the doctor how he had followed his advice by fasting and praying to Lord Ganesha, I silently remembered my letter, which I continued to keep a secret.

That evening, when I went to retrieve my letter from the Centre Road shrine, I found it to be covered in vibuthi. I gathered the vibuthi neatly into the folded envelope and went home. When Basant returned from rehearsals around 11pm that evening, he found me on the floor, crying. In my hand, was a pendant of Swami, which I had discovered in the folds of my letter, when I had eventually opened it. "*We are going to have a son,*" I declared to my husband.

While *I* may have been confident about it, everyone else around me was understandably cautious. My doctor insisted that I 'take it easy' and at 3 months, he inserted 3 stitches in my womb as a preventative measure. Even when I would occasionally spot, I was not afraid. By this stage, I knew that Swami was God, and that He was always there with me. At 26 weeks, my doctor insisted that I be admitted for delivery. But before doing so, and much to the chagrin of my doctor, Basant and I raced to the shops, as we were not prepared for an early arrival.

While I selected only blue and white items, Basant selected lemon - 'just in case'! Our son Desh was born on 26 March 1994, through natural delivery with absolutely no drugs and no labour pains at all. I felt nothing but peace and bliss – of the kind one is never able to recapture.

In our home, we had a disc-type picture of Swami with the words 'Why Fear When I Am Here'. When Basant would pray, he had the habit of putting vibuthi on both our foreheads. But this particular morning, after praying for our premature baby, and as I was still in the hospital, he dotted the picture of Swami on the disc instead. Then he brought the disc to the hospital in the hope of placing it on our son's incubator. On seeing the curly haired figure in orange, the white nurse asked if that was the child's 'grandfather'. When Basant told her that it was actually his wife's Guru who lived in India, she argued: *"No. That can't be. I saw Him here yesterday!"* She then came up to me and explained: *"Mrs Ramchander, I saw your God in the corner of the delivery room."*

Swami gave me my son.

When he was 15 months old, I fell pregnant again. I carried our second baby to full term, delivering our son Aman on 26 April 1996. This precious baby boy lived for only one hour… before passing from this world. Words cannot describe our grief. With hindsight, I understand that it had to have been for a reason – one that I perhaps will never fully grasp. My guess is that it was probably because I would never have coped as a single mother of two little boys…. You see, three years later, my husband Basant died suddenly of a heart attack.

I was a 35 year old widow. With my 5 year old son.

I was angry. I was upset. And life was hard.

Even though Basant had almost prophetically ensured that I got my driver's licence in the very same month he died, I still felt helpless. There were days when I didn't know how we would buy our next loaf of bread; days when I would break down in tears in the shops because I was lost and confused; days when I was robbed because I was too naïve; and days when my thoughts turned dark and suicidal. All I could do… was to stand in front of Swami's picture… and beg: *"I can't do this on my own. You have to give me strength."*

And He did. Swami always provided for us. Through the love of our Sai family who would bring gifts for my child; through the generosity of a kind boss who ensured that my son would receive a good education; through performance bonuses, second-hand offers, and so much more - the two of us persevered. We stayed the course, by being anchored to Him, especially when it mattered most.

One Friday night in 2006, on our way home from EHV classes in Durban North, we stopped at a traffic light that wasn't working. With bhajans playing softly (my practice whenever I am on the roads after sunset), I took off again, slowly. But all of a sudden, a car came flying through the intersection, ramming into the front passenger seat, where my 12 year old son was buckled in. It pushed our vehicle into the opposite lane with fast-moving oncoming traffic. *"Swami! Swami!"* I screamed. At that very moment, a speeding oncoming car, screeched to a halt, a mere centimetres before impact – an impact that would definitely have taken my son's life. My Toyota Tazz, with shattered glass and tyres torn out, was a complete write-off. But my son suffered only a few superficial bruises. The driver of the oncoming vehicle, the one that had stopped just in the nick of time, an African gentleman, was completely shaken up. After helping to get my son out of the car, he said to us: *"My car just stopped. On its own!"* While he may have been perplexed, we knew that Swami was the Automatic Emergency Braking System, present in our lives long before ABS became commercially available in South Africa.

Even though I had always dreamed of having the ideal family, and even though that dream was inexplicably cut short, I am so grateful to Bhagawan for blessing me with my son. When he was still in my tummy, his dad

would play the musical notes, using my stomach as a tabla. *"Sa re ga ma pa da ni sa,"* he would sing. My son is now a grown man, who has music coursing through his veins, the teachings of Sai Baba coursing through his decisions, and the love of our Beloved Swami coursing through his every heartbeat.

What more could a mother ask for?

SALOSHNEE RAMCHANDER, 60
PARLOCK, DURBAN

31. SOFT AND SMOOTH

The film 'Aura of Divinity' was the medium through which I was first exposed to Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The late Dr S Cooppan from Boston USA played it for us in the early 80's. Shortly thereafter, we began attending satsang at the Greenwood Park Temple. But I had no real desire to see the Physical Form of Sai Baba. In fact, we were the last ones in our family to make the trip to India. But after persistent pressure from my dear wife Kanaga, I eventually relented, and the two of us travelled to Prashanthi Nilayam in September 1995, for what turned out to be an exciting 10-day stay at the ashram.

While it never occurred to us to write letters ourselves, Kanaga and I had a bunch of letters we needed to give to Swami on behalf of others in South Africa. One letter in particular belonged to a colleague of mine, a Muslim director, whose family resided in Shirdi and knew of Sai Baba, but who gave me explicit instructions to keep the letter a secret. Nonetheless, it was my wife who took the letters to our first darshan, but when she failed to deliver them, she looked to me and said, *"You try."* With my chronic back problem, I had initially planned to sit on the bench, but I reluctantly accepted the responsibility. If I fail, I thought, I will simply put the letters into the post-box!

Well, I needn't have concerned myself with the whereabouts of the post-box, because at the next darshan, and from my vantage point in the 4th row, I saw Swami Himself collecting letters from many outstretched hands. I tried to lift up and reach my own hand forward but the sevadal 'shooed' me to sit down. Seeing this, Swami stood firm and gestured with His Hand as if to say, 'give it to Me.' So I leaned forward and handed the bundle of letters over to the Divine Recipient, thus fulfilling my courier duties.

Despite excruciating backpain, I continued to sit on the floor for further darshans. Seeing my discomfort, a devotee advised me to purchase a japamala to help take my thoughts away from the pain and focus it on God's name, which I duly did. One day, when I was in the first row, Swami stood right in front of me, and began talking to the South Africans seated behind me. *"Where are you from? How many?"* He asked. As this conversation was going on, I tried to look at Swami's Feet but couldn't see them. In a completely spontaneous move, I lifted Swami's robe with both my hands. Then, having found my target, I took padanamaskar. His Divine Feet felt so soft and smooth, much like lady's feet. Despite my forward gesture, Swami did not flinch at all. He simply finished His conversation, and moved on.

On our final day, that same group of South Africans was called in for an early-morning interview before darshan. After entering the room, everyone began to sit on the floor. But I noticed that there were two chairs in the front - one was clearly for Swami, and there was another unoccupied chair next to it. In yet another spontaneous act, I took the liberty of sitting on that unoccupied seat. The very next moment, Swami opened the door and entered the room. He put the lights on and made sure that everyone was comfortable. He then

took His seat, and once again, He didn't bat an eyelid at me who was sitting right next to Him.

It was a very informal interview. And contrary to what one might expect, I was not in the least bit intimidated, but rather most comfortable. All the while, Swami was resting His left hand on the arm-rest of His chair. Since I was sitting so close to Him, I once again spontaneously took hold of His Hand and held it for some time. That Divine Hand felt so delicate, and so soft and smooth, much like a lady's. And here again, Swami didn't flinch. He simply left His Hand there, allowing it to be touched and held. Which I did for a while, before eventually removing my own hand to enable another devotee sitting on the floor below me, to enjoy the same privilege.

That morning, Swami was a Counsellor to all of us in the interview room. He asked us our names and occupations. When I told Him my name, He asked: **"Where is your father's name?"** This was a most significant question, because unlike my two younger brothers who go by SC and VC Naidoo, I am simply R Naidoo, for I was not registered with my father Coopasamy's name. Then there was a mother who tried to describe a problem she was having with her daughter. But Swami simply remarked: **"South Africans are spoiling their children."** When the conversation steered to dreams, I mentioned that I too had a dream of Swami. "Yes." He confirmed. But He clarified further, **"You only had one dream."** To date, I have still only ever had the one dream of Swami.

Swami then asked a young white girl to give Him her ring. As it was passed forward, all of us could see that it was a simple ring with an unremarkable green stone. Swami looked at the ring and then blew on it. The ring that was passed back to the wide-eyed girl was a sparkling gold one with three diamond stones! Following this amazing sight, Swami spoke to us about concentration, contemplation and meditation, at which point I asked Him to please bless my newly-acquired japamala. Swami took the mala and put it on His lap. Then He said, **"Why 108 times? The Name of the Lord is Infinite."** As He said this, He raised His Hand, gesturing upward. At the end of the interview, Swami gave us all little packets of vibhuti, and we filed out for darshan. I sat next to a devotee who noticed that I had just come out of the interview room. We spoke briefly, but in that short conversation he made a comment I will never forget. He said: "*You are very fortunate. Your life will never be the same*." And he was exactly right…

While at the time I did not comprehend the full meaning of this statement, I have learnt that it certainly did not mean that my life would be easy. A few days after returning home, my mother suffered a stroke. And within a year, I needed to have major neck surgery, my wife became ill, and I began to encounter challenges with work. However, with every challenge thrown my way, I also received the strength to deal with it. It was through Swami's Grace and my faith in Him, that I made it through those ordeals.

I now realise that no matter how close the physical contact with Swami may be, there is no surety that life will be without its trials and tribulations. In other words, unlike the beautiful touch of Swami's Feet or His Hand, life is never soft and smooth. All we can do is to hold on tight, and remember that He is with us all the time, giving us the strength and succour we need.

RAMAKRISHNA (BILLY) NAIDOO, 86
GREENWOOD PARK, DURBAN

32. YOU TEACH BEST WHAT YOU MOST NEED TO LEARN

I was introduced to Swami by my mother and, by the age of 16, I was attending satsang in Hartley Road, Overport. But when I got married at the age of 22, I lost my way.

As a young wife and mother with three sons, I struggled. I struggled to manage the boys' boisterous energy; I struggled with depression and would frequently sleep after completing my chores; I struggled with feelings of disconnection in Tongaat, and I desperately missed my family back in Durban; I struggled with a hopeless inferiority complex and woefully regretted losing my independence by leaving a good job at the bank. I also struggled with financial insecurity which was exacerbated when my husband left his own job to start a business of his own. I was totally against this decision as we didn't even have a house to call our own. In short, I struggled my way through a lot of challenges and frequently felt myself incapable of dealing with the blows of fate and of my own life's choices. Through all of this, my faith in Swami was non-existent.

In my third pregnancy, I came close to losing my youngest son, who was born after an emergency c-section with the chord still around his neck. I spent some time recovering at my mother's house, but when I returned to Tongaat, I felt a stirring within me to return to Thursday satsangs. This impulse was reinforced when I met a Sai devotee at a wedding in Tongaat and he invited me to the local bhajan sessions. I took my three boys to the Belvedere Sai Centre and Swami became my Lifesaver once again.

Slowly, I began to pull myself together, and devotees at the centre began to coax me into teaching Balvikas. Apparently, to others, I possessed the qualities of a teacher. Of course, I resisted this seemingly ridiculous idea. Instead, I embarked on my first trip to see Swami in 1993 at the age of 38. At the Whitefield ashram in Bangalore, I had the good fortune of receiving Swami's padanamaskar, as well as His vibuthi, which was materialized for another devotee, but then shared with me.

However, when I returned home to South Africa, I encountered one of the most difficult times in my life. One night, when I was particularly low, I had a dream of Swami. He was walking down the centre of the darshan aisle, and I walked up to Him from behind. I tapped Him on His shoulder, and He turned around. The Look and the Words that then emanated from Him, became my life's turning point. His look was stern, and His words were: **"Stop your playing around."**

Almost counter-intuitively, I was not broken by that dream. I awoke feeling strengthened and emboldened. I knew that I had to help myself. So I started locum teaching, and I agreed to teach Balvikas. In fact, I started to do many things which I had previously thought I was not capable of.

By teaching the senior Balvikas children, I have become better equipped to cope with my own life's struggles. I have learned that one needs to be detached from the world and attached only to God. I have realised that in feeling sorry for myself, I was being young and immature. Teaching Balvikas has given me strength and a sense of purpose and has shown me that one's self-worth is not tied up in degrees or fancy job titles. I am now also able to evaluate situations from a different perspective, for example, the small town of Tongaat with its 5 big temples and many cultural activities has actually been good for my spiritual progress.

I have since made nine trips to the ashram and through all of life's ups and downs, Swami has been by my side, guiding and supporting me. Like the time He appeared in my dream in which we were turning arthi for Swami at a satsang. He immediately stopped us and said: **"Go inside! It is raining."** I awoke from that dream with a strong sense that my son was in trouble. And sure enough, the family had been keeping it from me, and

my dear son needed help.

The external circumstances of our lives may never change, or if they do, it may only be very slowly. It is we who have to change. But in Swami, I have all the strength that I need.

SANDY CHETTY, 70
TONGAAT, DURBAN

33. THE PROTECTOR AND SUPPORT OF ALL

Sai Tera Naam Baba Tera Naam
Thuhi Sai Sam Thuhi Sai Krishna
Thu Sabe Rakawara He Thuhi Sabeke Sahara He
Jo Jo Sai Ram Kahega Baba Usko Shanthi Thega

Sai is your name, Baba is your name
You are Sai Ram, You are Sai Krishna
You are the Protector & Support of all
Whoever says Sai Ram and calls You Baba, will get peace

This was the first bhajan I heard when I was but 10 years old, at a satsang held at my uncle's house. Though I did not know who Sai Baba was, the words of that bhajan are still etched in my memory, some 65 years later. There was something about Sai Baba that drew me close to Him. Over the years, Swami has become my Friend, my God, my Guru, my Preceptor. The mere thought of Him makes my heart flutter at a rapid pace. My entire world, fraught with untold challenges shaped by karma across many births, revolves around Swami. For He has been my Protector and Support, through it all.

I grew up in a tin house with mud floors. My father was a factory worker and my mum stayed at home. Both did the best they could to provide for us, but there was no doubt that we lived a life of poverty. The fact that I was able to qualify as an educator, was itself a blessing, because it secured my future. Unfortunately, that future included an abusive marital relationship which ended in divorce after seventeen years. But that marriage also provided me with my biggest blessing of this lifetime, my son Ashish. Through regular satsang and participation in all the Sai activities, I acquired the resilience, tenacity and fortitude to not only protect my son, but to also pick up the pieces of my life and move on. My primary source of sustenance was persistent letter writing to Swami. By this, I mean writing detailed letters to Swami, once a week, and mailing it to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Prashanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, India. This simple weekly ritual was a healing and cathartic process for me (even though I sometimes imagined Swami to say: *"Oh no, not another letter from her!"*)

Ashish, on the other hand, acquired his coping skills by attending Balvikas, where the lessons learnt equipped him for life's challenges. With Swami's Grace, the two of us were able to visit Prashanthi Nilayam on nine occasions, giving us the strength we both sorely needed. On one of our trips the sevadals were very stern and kept telling us not to touch Swami, unless He expressly permitted it. So, one darshan, when Swami stood right in front of me, I was just too intimidated to take padanamaskar. It was only as He walked away that I realised my mistake and felt like such a 'pagal'. I apologised to Swami for my stupidity, but that very evening, He appeared to me in a dream and permitted me to not only touch, but to also kiss His Holy Feet!

My medical challenges commenced in the year 2000. I was invited to my brother's home for a sumptuous meal, but it was not to be. I had severe pains in my side and was rushed to hospital where I was diagnosed with pancreatitis. I was interrogated about my drinking habits, which I vehemently denied. After all, I relied on spiritual upliftment of a different kind – the kind provided by the 'Protector and Support of All'. The normal count of amylase and lipase in a healthy person is 80 – 100. Due to the pancreatitis, my count used to escalate to more than 21 000, which ordinarily could lead to multiple organ failure. I came close to death's door on many occasions, and know, without a shred of doubt, that it was my Swami who always brought me back.

My pancreatitis would flare up every three months or so which, apart from the illness itself, presented many work-related challenges. My principal was not a very sympathetic person. But I simply handed the problem over to Swami and in no time, the same principal was promoted to another school! But I would not waste my time, even in the hospital. Whenever I was able to, I would do my Sai work, researching for spiritual presentations, not to mention using my chanting beads and vibuthi.

I became an insulin-dependent diabetic, who was also insulin resistant. This meant that whenever I injected myself, I would break out in urticaria. My eyes would be swollen shut and every part of my body covered in a rash. Therefore, prior to injecting myself, I had to take antihistamines. This went on for many years, until eventually, I was directed to a doctor who removed my gall bladder. This resolved many of my issues and I never suffered from pancreatitis again.

But a huge challenge awaited me in October 2024. I fell dangerously ill and the doctors could not diagnose what was wrong. I was in a coma for ten days, and when I regained consciousness, I was mostly delirious, incoherent and violent, to the point that I had to be secured to the bed. During this period, I did not recognise people at all, but I was told that whenever a photo of Swami was held in front of me, even with my eyes closed, something within would register, and I would put my hands together in prayer. After numerous blood tests, MRIs and medical consultations, the doctors were close to giving up on me. My family was told to go home and pray. Ashish was devastated, but he never gave up. Instead, he went home and appealed to Swami for His intervention as he couldn't bear to see his mum in such a pathetic condition.

Through Swami's Grace, I was diagnosed with a rare form of encephalitis, and the correct course of treatment finally commenced. This entailed chemotherapy and admission to the oncology department where no visitors were allowed except very close family. During this period, Ashish had a dream in which he saw a Man and a Woman who he felt strongly to be Lord Shiva and Mother Parvathi. This Divine Couple held my hand and led me towards a temple, at the entrance to which the three of us sat down on some steps. Ashish then turned to Swami who was standing beside him and said, *"Please heal my mother of the encephalitis."* And Swami replied: **"Look at her. There's nothing wrong with her. The encephalitis will go away."** At this point, Ashish saw the Woman light a lamp in front of me and begin to instruct me in chanting the Tryambakam mantra, while lovingly holding my hand. After this incredible dream, my son felt comforted, and my own consciousness began to steadily improve, until I was eventually discharged after 3 months. The Tryambakam mantra has since become a part of my daily spiritual discipline and my recovery can only be attributed to Swami's Love and Compassion.

My journey through life has been filled with immense challenges. But it is only through the 'Protector and Support of All' that I have emerged stronger each time. Swami has never let me down. He has always been there, guiding me through the darkest moments. Through our past actions, we shape our own destiny. This is something we cannot deny or avoid. But my life is a testimony to the power of His Grace and the unshakeable faith that, no matter what we may have to face, His Love will always see us through.

"Lord Sai, make me a worthy instrument of Thy Divine Mission.
Your majestic gait, sublime appearance, noble demeanour, hypnotic, powerful, magnetic attraction
That imprisons and pulls my heartstrings.
I am but rendered helpless in the face of such profound love."

-An extract from a poem written by Nirmala Nagasar

NIRMALA DEVI NAGASAR (75) AND ASHISH NAGASAR (48)
PIETERMARITZBURG

He teaches not merely from without but also from within, not merely through words but through silence, not merely by books but also by the bricks and bouquets of fortune.

For nothing can give man greater Shakthi than the awareness of his own indestructibility.[17]

OM SRI SAI SARANAGATHA TRANAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Saviour of those who Surrender

34. WHATEVER HAPPENS IS GOOD FOR ME

In this life, I was blessed to learn of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba at the age of 10. Our family was going through a challenging time as my dear mum had been admitted to hospital for severe depression. When she was discharged, my dad's colleague recommended that we attend a Sai service in Chatsworth. So, one beautiful Sunday morning, my parents, sister and I, entered the Sudha Mandir for satsang, and found our true home. I distinctly remember the strong feeling of safety that seemed to surround my family from that moment on. And when I saw the tears of joy rolling down my mum's cheeks as she listened to the bhajans, I learnt, even at that tender age, what Divine Love felt like.

My mum belonged to a generation that didn't believe in psychologists and anti-depressants, so bhajans became her medicine. She loved singing to our beloved Swami and never had to be admitted for depression again. So we were blessed with another 30 years of her physical presence in our lives. But like most other families, we still had many more challenges to face. However, Swami was now our Guide. When we encountered outer chaos, He walked beside us, and was our Source of Peace. Throughout my school years, my parents, two sisters and I, would gather every Saturday afternoon and dedicate a little family bhajan session to Swami. The feeling of loving unity we shared when we made music together for Swami, was truly magical.

It was my mum who encouraged us to play musical instruments. She, like many other mums, was a simple soul. She faced many struggles, but she gave us the biggest gift a mother can give to her child – her love for Swami, and the manifestation of that love through music and service to society. When she departed this earthly realm in 2020, all her efforts were rewarded, as she was surrounded by her loved ones bringing the roof down with her favourite bhajans and giving her a heavenly send-off. Even to this day, every bhajan I sing or hear, has the power to bring her sweet essence immediately into my consciousness.

There is a belief that the soul chooses its parents based on its particular need for spiritual progress. I am certain that this was true in my case. After watching my mum fight depression in her younger years followed by colon cancer in her later years, it has certainly felt like Divine Planning that I too have had to face both these challenges in my own life. From the time I was in matric, I have experienced symptoms of depression. But not recognising them in myself, I didn't seek professional help. I simply kept it at bay by immersing myself in Swami's work at the Sai centre, as well as in community service projects. I derive great happiness from helping others, and that's how I kept myself going. But often, when I was alone, I found that I would sleep excessively and struggle to find the energy or the motivation for self-care and personal goals.

During my fourth year at medical school, I was close to dropping out. It was just a couple of weeks before my final exams when I felt like I just couldn't go on. One night, feeling hopeless and desperate, I sat on the floor and cried out to Swami. I prayed through the night, pleading with Him to help me. Suddenly, I felt the urge to grab a sheet of paper and write down all my thoughts as if I was speaking to Swami. That fateful night, I wrote almost 3 pages without lifting my pen. And then… I felt a sense of peace wash over me. Thus began my life-long habit of journaling, whereby I thank Swami for all His blessings of the day or week, and I ask for His guidance with all my current dilemmas and upcoming tasks. Recharged with minimal sleep, I received the strength to wake up at 3am, to meditate, and then to start studying for my final exams. For the next month, I continued with this practice, of barely speaking to anyone, of getting up every morning at 3am, meditating, and studying until 10pm at night. With Swami's Grace, I passed my exams and was able to continue with my medical studies.

However, after the intense struggles of internship, community service and junior years in busy public hospitals, including three bouts of TB, I began to experience burn-out. Because I understood my own limits in terms

of endurance capacity, I elected not to specialise and rather to focus on giving my best service to my patients. However, I was still required to do 24 hour calls at the hospital every 5-7 days. These calls were gruelling and would take many days for me to recover. The net effect was that the attention I paid to my personal health and wellbeing continued to slide. Additionally, I became very involved with our Sai centre outreach project which served the children of the Thandanani informal settlement. It was a very rewarding project through which we built a strong bond with the community. Initially, we started with Education in Human Values (EHV) classes, but later we added reading and maths classes, support with university applications, youth mentorships, a sandwich programme, as well as many sports and cultural events. I was also blessed with the opportunity to foster a few teenagers from the community who became part of my family. Seeing that I had never planned to have children, Swami sent me these beautiful souls so that I could learn from them and experience the joys (and heartaches) of being a parent.

As the years went by, my life became increasingly unbalanced. I became more absorbed in trying to 'solve' the problems of every suffering soul that crossed my path, both at work and in the community. Inevitably, this led to less available energy for myself, my family, and my day job. My childhood role models have always been people like Florence Nightingale and Mother Teresa, who devoted their entire lives to serving humanity. I wanted to do exactly the same. But I have come to realise that these great souls, whom I aspired to be like, were only able to serve untiringly because their personal spiritual foundations were very strong - ultimately, it was nothing but Divine Energy flowing through them.

With Infinite Compassion, Swami gave me many signs along the way. Signs that I needed to simplify, re-evaluate and restructure my life to strengthen my spiritual foundation. One such sign was when a devastating fire burnt down most of the houses in the Thandanani settlement shortly after we had hosted a big concert for the children. This meant that most of the gifts the children had received, were destroyed. I also grieved when children that we had mentored from Grade R, still succumbed to drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, and school drop-out. I began to feel totally overwhelmed, and that none of our programmes were running smoothly. There was much I needed to learn, including how to empower others and delegate work, and to focus on quality rather than quantity.

In my earlier years, I would read every Sai book that I could get my hands on, attend sadhana camps, and never miss a bhajan practice or weekly bhajan session. However, as the years went by, I had begun to neglect these activities. My daily prayers were usually rushed and often took place while driving. Then, at some point, I found myself dealing with anger issues, getting into unhealthy relationships, and losing my sense of self. Until there came a day when I felt particularly lost again… I woke up that morning at 4am and it was clear to me that I had to change. As a minimum, I had to make time to attend bhajans every week and build up my spiritual base again.

I once read a blog by a Sai student in which our dear Mother Sai describes surrender simply as having the thought: **"Whatever happens is good for me."** With hindsight, I have come to appreciate the truth of this statement.

My mum's diagnosis with cancer in 2017 forced me to take stock of my life, and to spend quality time with her. I had four precious years to fully express my love to my mother, and to hold her hand through her cancer journey. Then in December 2022, my own diagnosis of colon cancer taught me so many things. I was forced to make more time for personal sadhana, family, and exercise; to seek professional help for my mental health; to cut unhealthy ties; to focus more of my energy on making positive changes at my day-job; and to refocus the Thandanani project on EHV while placing it firmly back into Swami's Hands.

I have also learnt that Swami doesn't need me for the work to happen. He simply gives me the opportunities to be of service to Him. Because ultimately, He is always the Doer. When I had the idea to start a values-based

non-profit organisation (NPO) that would operate independently, but then received my cancer diagnosis, another youth called me while I was in the hospital with the exact same idea! He went on to set up the structure, and register the NPO, all while I was still in the hospital. This was not only humbling for me, but it also taught me to stop micromanaging, which was my tendency. Then, when I began to bleed due to complications from radiotherapy, and had to be hospitalised again in mid-2023, I completely forgot about a sanitary pad seva that I had agreed to with the Umhlanga Sai Centre. Weeks went by, and though I slowly got my strength back, my memory never returned. One day, I began to spring-clean my house and found a spare ink cartridge. I decided to take it to the Thandanani library and check in on the project after my long absence. Imagine my surprise when, whilst there, I received a call announcing the arrival of a whole group from the Umhlanga Sai centre for the sanitary pad distribution. Fortunately, I was able to gather all the young girls from the settlement within 30 minutes, and managed to save the day. It was truly a miracle – a Sai-incidence - that I was there on the exact day and time needed. When I wasn't able to fulfil my responsibilities, Swami made sure it happened. He is always in charge.

Even my permanent colostomy bag which has served to save my life, has forced me to see my life through different eyes. It's a life filled with the blessings and support of family, friends, colleagues and Sai groups. I am so grateful to Swami for holding my hand, not only through the cancer treatment, but through every tentative step of my life. Even when I foolishly ignored His signs, He still held my hand firmly.

Whatever happens is indeed good for us. Because the Love of our Divine Mother would never permit it otherwise.

Cancer has been one of my greatest gifts. Because of it, I see every new day that I get to live, as an opportunity to become closer to our dear Lord, and to live my life as His instrument.

DR. TAMARRA SUBRAMONY, 45
GREENWOOD PARK, DURBAN

35. A TEST OF FAITH

Growing up in a traditional home, prayer was instilled in me from a young age. Offering water in the mornings, praying before meals, and thanking Swami in our bedtime prayers, were all part of our daily routine. Attending weekly bhajans and Balvikas was not just an obligation - it was a joy. My love for singing ensured my spiritual connection remained strong, and that Swami's name was on our lips constantly. But life, as it often does, changed.

Marriage brought new traditions, new prayers, and a new city. Though I still loved the music of bhajans, my connection to Swami began to dim, flickering like a candle in the wind. At times, it felt as though even He had forgotten me. My faith was becoming like a loadshedding schedule, sometimes on, but most times off. Between 2021 and 2022, Swami must have seen my struggle and decided it was time to remind me subtly, and in small doses, that He had never left.

On my birthday in May 2021, I tested positive for COVID. I brushed it off, expecting nothing more than a mild flu. Little did I know, it was the beginning of a test unlike any before. My husband was hospitalised and placed in ICU for weeks. While he fought for his life, I discovered I was three months pregnant.

Hope flickered, only to be cruelly extinguished when COVID took my baby. When my husband was finally discharged, he returned home semi-paralysed.

I had never prayed like I did then. I had never lit my lamp with such devotion, and never whispered Swami's name with such raw desperation. But I made sure to pray like my mum did – without bargaining and without pleading for miracles. Instead, I thanked Him for my husband's survival, for my son's health, and for the strength to endure.

After the miscarriage, I made peace with having just one child. But at the end of the year, I was blessed with another pregnancy. It was not an easy one. Every day was a battle to stay healthy and disciplined. Yet, I carried on, trusting that Swami was watching over us. Two weeks before my due date, I was in a car accident. Terrified, I rushed to my doctor and, to my relief, was assured that my baby was unharmed. She was strong and with a healthy weight.

However, a few nights before her birth, I was uneasy. As always, I fell asleep to bhajans, letting Swami's Name soothe my worries. But the moment arrived. *"It's time,"* I told my husband. We reached the hospital only to find that there were no doctors or operating theatres available. But, in true Swami style, a doctor suddenly became available, and a theatre opened up. The delivery was complicated, and I found myself waiting in fear, chanting His Name silently. And then - silence.

My daughter was finally born, but there was no cry, and no sound. She was blue and lifeless. Time stood still. I wanted to scream, to question Swami, to blame Him. Was this His protection? His love? Why had he brought me this far only to take her away? I closed my eyes and surrendered, whispering, *"Om Sai Ram."*

And then her cry pierced the air. A single, beautiful sound that shattered the silence and filled my heart with overwhelming relief.

Swami had never left. He had been there all along.
I just needed to keep my faith.

YAADH, 40
JOHANNESBURG

36. SURRENDERING WITHOUT CONDITIONS

Why get agitated? Let Me take care of all your business.
I shall be the one who will think about them.
I am waiting for nothing else than your surrender to Me, and then you do not have to worry any more about anything.
Say farewell to all fears and discouragement.
You demonstrate that you do not trust Me.
On the contrary, you must rely blindly on Me.
To surrender means to turn your thoughts away from troubles, to turn them away from difficulties that you encounter and from all your problems.
Leave everything in My hands saying, "Lord, Thy will be done. Thou think of it."
That is to say, "Lord, I thank you, for you have taken everything into your hands, and you will resolve this for my highest good." [18]

Many of us believe we understand what it means to surrender to the Lord in times of trials and difficulties. Yet, we are unable to surrender completely when the moment calls for it. We continue to have fears and doubts, and we find it difficult to rely blindly on the Lord. This is all due to our lack of faith, which is essential for true surrender.

In December 2022, I planned to visit Prashanthi after a period of 7 years, which was the longest break between my visits. My mission was twofold - to participate in the Christmas Choir and to go to the Brindhavan ashram in Whitefield, Bangalore, to view the digital museum (Divyasmrthi), which houses Swami's life story. I was scheduled to leave Prashanthi on 29 December, spend one night in Whitefield to visit the museum, and then depart for home on 30 December.

Now, entrance to Divyasmrthi is free, but it is essential that one makes an online booking before visiting. I tried several times to make this booking before I left home, with no success. Then, when I was in Prashanthi, I tried again many times, even enlisting the help of my niece who wanted to tag along with me for this visit. But a fault in the system prevented us from booking. I was extremely disappointed, and I did not know whom to contact for assistance. Finally, I surrendered it to Swami and told Him that if it was His wish that I could not visit the museum on this trip, then so be it. So, I changed my travel plans so I could leave for home directly from Prashanthi.

Just two days before I could depart, I was put in touch with the Head of Operations at Brindhavan by a very dear friend. I immediately contacted him and explained the problem I was having with the online booking. Not only did he do my booking, but he also booked my accommodation and transport to Whitefield. I was overjoyed to see my wish unfolding at such lightning speed. This only happened because I had surrendered completely to Swami and He resolved it for my 'highest good' as you will see…

I visited the Divyasmrthi museum in Brindhavan and felt deeply satisfied that my wishes were fulfilled. But there was still more to come… My new Sai brother, the Head of Operations, sought me out and invited me to a special prayer in Swami's home, Trayee, that evening. I knew this was something very special as entrance to Trayee is restricted to only a few people. Sitting for the evening prayer and abhishekam gave me goosebumps. I felt truly humbled and privileged to be sitting inside Swami's home, in the very space where His beautiful Feet walked, and feeling His Divine Presence. The whole experience was so surreal, and I packed the memory of it in my head as a blessing not to be forgotten.

But the blessings were not yet over. After the evening prayer, my Sai brother invited me to the morning pooja, again in Trayee, before I departed for home. As I was staying just outside the ashram in Gokulam, I woke early the next morning and made my way on foot by 05h30, only to be told by the security that I could not enter the ashram gates as they only open at 08h30. No amount of explaining would convince them that this unknown woman arriving on foot was actually invited to the intimate and special pooja. Fortunately, after calling and confirming it with the Head, I was allowed in, and once again experienced the most amazing bliss. I left Brindhavan overjoyed and immensely grateful to Bhagawan for His special blessings.

I was fortunate to visit Brindhavan again in July 2023 for 2 days en route to Prashanthi. This time I was granted accommodation inside the ashram and had four divine opportunities to sit inside Trayee and observe the morning and evening pooja. My heart was overflowing with love and gratitude.

When I look back on these experiences, I can only attribute it to my dedication to doing Swami's work through His Educare programmes. He has given us the assurance that when you do His work, He will do yours. After I tried and failed so many times, Swami took over the task of booking me a visit to Divyasmrthi – but then He gave me so much more, more than I could ever have asked for – all for my highest good.

To my mind, the key is Surrender - surrendering to Sai without attaching any conditions at all.

ANONYMOUS, 66
DURBAN

37. LOST & FOUND

I was indeed fortunate to be born to two of Swami's greatest devotees. Having joined the Sai fold before even starting school, my parents set a firm foundation for me within the Sai movement. They were two of the founding members of the Merebank Sai Centre which, in spite of very humble beginnings, was one of the first Sai centres in South Africa. My parents' immense faith in Swami is what made me totally believe that anything and everything was possible.

My journey with Sai and my career grew in parallel. I know that Swami was the force behind everything in my life - I was always in the right place at exactly the right time - resulting in success beyond understanding. Swami's Divine Hand through major life changing occurrences set the basis of my life, and I was able to accomplish much, but only because of the Grace of Swami.

However, it was not only the 'major miracles', but also little Sai-incidents which kept reminding me that Swami is the Doer and that all I needed to do was His work. Swami says if you do His work, He will always take care of you. This has happened so many times that my philosophy has become: Everything and anything is possible, with Swami holding me in His Heart.

In 2018, I found myself in Puttaparthi over Guru Purnima. One morning, I purchased a SIM card to stay in contact with home and to undertake research as I was busy with my thesis. Having received the new Indian SIM card, I put my SA SIM card safely in my wallet. Then I continued with my day at the ashram, until the afternoon when I went back to my room to do some research. It was then that I looked for my South African SIM card in order to put it away safely, but it was nowhere to be found. I ransacked my bag and looked everywhere in the room, with no success. So, I decided to surrender this challenge to Swami, and then had a good night's sleep.

The next morning before bhajans, I stopped for a cup of coffee at the nearby kiosk. While standing on the grass patch next to the kiosk, I noticed that the cleaning ladies had just finished sweeping the area with their frond brooms. Sipping on my hot coffee, my eyes spotted something tiny and yellow peeking out of the sand. I bent down and picked it up. Amazingly, it was my MTN SIM card. Clearly, this was all Swami's doing, having surrendered the challenge to Him the night before!

And this was not the first time the Lord has risen to one of my challenges ….

Many years ago, when I served as the Regional Youth Convenor, one of our seva activities was to clean up the grounds where the current Sai school in Chatsworth stands. I arrived early and decided to start the clean-up while waiting for the other youth to join me. After a few minutes, I felt thirsty and went back to my car, which was parked close by on the grounds, to get my water. However, when reaching the car, I could not find my keys. I looked on the ground beside the driver's side door and all around the car. I traced my steps back to where I had been clearing the ground – still no sign of the keys anywhere. I decided to surrender the situation to Swami and to simply get on with the work with the other youth who had begun to arrive. We worked together for a

few hours and before long, it was time to pray and depart.

It was only as I approached my car, that I remembered that I had lost my keys. But there, on the ground by the driver's side door, was my car keys - in the exact place where I had looked for it earlier. This could only be Swami's doing!

Thank You Swami, for always finding my stuff, when I have perhaps been careless.
Thank You Swami, for always playing with me, as a reminder of Your Presence.
Thank You Swami, for always guiding me through life,
So that I may never become lost
But always be found in Your Heart.

NIRMALA GOVENDER, 56
MEREBANK, DURBAN

38. LOVE MY UNCERTAINTY

I was fortunate to be part of the Ubuntu musical programme in 2010. As this was the first time our country was embarking on such a large pilgrimage to Prashanthi Nilayam, there was great excitement throughout the whole organisation. I too was gripped by the euphoria that flowed through our country.

However, in order for me to go to India I had to make certain arrangements. You see, I was self- employed at the time, and I needed to ensure that someone could tend to my business while I was away. Ordinarily that person was my friend Mickey, who had relieved me in the past whenever I needed a break. He was a trustworthy person who held a clerical position at King Edward Hospital. Mickey's annual leave was also due, so he submitted his application, and it was approved. All was looking good – there was someone to look after my shop; my ticket was booked; everything at home was taken care of; and I was ready to go. But a great disappointment was about to befall me.

About ten days prior to our scheduled departure, I received a call from a regretful Mickey. His leave had been cancelled. Apparently, there was a serious problem in his department and until the issue was rectified, nobody was permitted to take their leave. I felt terribly disappointed and was at a loss in terms of what to do. I had no other assistant who could run my business in my absence. Such was my desperation that I was even prepared to close the shop. But as I was also sub-letting space to a tenant, this was not possible. I realised that my only hope of going to Prashanthi was Swami Himself. So I prayed intensely, and surrendered the situation to Him.

A day or two later an idea entered my mind. My tenant was an elderly lady who had been hiring out bridal dresses from my premises for three years. Perhaps she could help me out? When I approached her with the idea, she reluctantly agreed, but I could sense her discomfort. As she was not familiar with my line of business, I had to give her a crash course within a week. I knew this was a difficult task for her, but I put my faith in Swami and left it in His hands.

However, a mere two days before we could leave for India, a delighted Mickey phoned to report that the matter at his workplace had been resolved, and he was now free to help me! I felt a wave of relief pass through me.

Upon reflection, I realised that going to the lengths of putting my elderly tenant through emergency training was Swami's test of my earnestness. Not only had I surrendered the business outcome to Him, but I had also demonstrated the sincerity of my desire to travel to see Him and sing for Him, together with the rest of my country. Such is the Grace of Bhagawan – that He will rapidly fix the records of a hospital in order to open the way for a simple devotee!

Bhagawan has always told us: Love My Uncertainty! I can't say that I do, but we certainly have to do our part, with the tools that we have at our disposal, while surrendering the outcome to Him.

VIDYA NAIDOO, 75
NEWLANDS WEST, DURBAN

My Dears!

What is primarily needed for one who wants to ultimately surrender himself entirely to the Lord is a consciousness of perfect security under the protecting grace of the Supreme Lord.

This consciousness can never leave us if we constantly practice the remembrance of Him. Verily, remembrance itself is Darshan. The repetition of God's name must lead to dedication of all actions to Him. This remembrance will be yours even when you are intellectually and physically active in all the walks of life when you consider that those activities are performed in the name and for the sake of the Lord.

During your off moments do not fail to keep your thoughts engaged in the contemplation of God; and at the same time meditate upon the truth that all your physical and mental powers have their source and inspiration from the cosmic energy of the Divine.

With Blessings
Baba[19]

OM SRI SAI ANANDA DAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who grants Bliss

39. MUSIC *IS* THE FOOD OF LOVE

"If music be the food of love, play on."
William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

Music has certainly been a powerful force in my own life, a force that lifts my spirits when I am down, and nourishes my weary soul. I am a lover of all genres of music, from Pink Floyd through to amapiano to classical guitar, and I tend to like my music loud. I used to say that if I hadn't been a teacher, I would have been the lead singer in a band, but the closest I came to fulfilling that pipe-dream was when I participated in our college play, Ipi Tombi!

Well, this wannabe rock singer was born in Redhill to a Hindu family that subscribed to ritualistic idol-worship and the slaughtering of animals which, from my perspective anyway, did not have any real meaning. But I dutifully went to the temple on prayer days because my father told me to. It was here that I found myself drawn to God in the form of Lord Krishna, and I would enjoy soaking in His calmness, either at the Ramakrishna Temple in Glen Anil or the Hare Krishna Temple in Chatsworth. Perhaps it was because of my love for the Divine Flautist that I respond to music in the way that I do. Anyway, I married the love of my life at the age of 22, and entered a new household in Chatsworth where my in-laws held bhajans at home every Monday. Even though I was a fully participating daughter-in-law, I felt little connection at the time to Sai Baba. I was simply the iron drawn to the magnet of the music.

In 1991, our daughter Yuventha was born with Angelman syndrome. This is a very rare neuro-genetic disorder that causes developmental delays and seizures, ultimately affecting basic functions such as speech, walking, balance and digestion. However, it is also known as the 'happiness syndrome' because children afflicted by it, have a very happy demeanour. This is exactly how Yuventha was - she would light up a room with her smiles and her laughter. She was in both the literal and the figurative sense, an 'Angel' on this earth. But I would be denying the truth if I said that caring for our child was easy. It was perhaps the most challenging trial of our lives. My husband and I were two young teachers with big dreams and minimal resources to care for a special needs child. By day, I was a teacher; by night, I was a nurse to my child; and on the weekends, I was a patient, waiting for long hours in the queues at Addington Hospital to collect free diapers. I was determined to make it all work and to make a good life for our family. And Yuventha made it worth the effort - she shared my love of music and would jig along with me as I danced by her bedside. When I felt I had no one else to talk to, she would be the one listening to me, always with a loving smile.

When she was 2-years-old, we built our own house in Redhill and, in the years that followed, were graced with two beautiful and healthy children, Thelishka and Krean, who have since grown into kind, compassionate human beings, that I am proud to have had a hand in raising. But back in 2001, when all three of my children were still little, I was a spent woman, both physically and emotionally. A dear friend then recommended that we attend a Thursday bhajan session at the Durban North Sai Centre. It was only when I sat at my first satsang that I came to realise how drained I was. Despite the devotional music, I simply sat there, numb. Nonetheless, we returned for a second Thursday satsang, and this time, the music began to do its magic …

"May the love we're sharing spread its wings,
Fly across the world and bring new joy to every being that is alive
Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu"

Those lyrics, that melody - it all penetrated my core, and something within me began to shift. After wiping away my tears, I began to immerse myself in Swami's discourses, seva projects, and teachings. And I found myself yearning to see His Physical Form. However, given Yuventha's condition, I knew this was simply not possible. Still, my yearning was becoming so intense that it left me feeling bitterly disappointed. Until one day, three months later, I had an experience that transcended physicality…

It took place during a Thursday satsang over the Christmas holiday period. I was seated in the first row of chairs enjoying the beautiful bhajans, when suddenly I felt the touch of a pair of hands pressing gently down on the top of my head. My immediate response was to think that this was the playful act of a youngster, whom we all loved dearly but knew to be prone to pranks. However, when I turned around to catch him, the young boy was nowhere to be seen. When I turned back to face the front, the sight before my eyes, would alter my life and my understanding of it, forever.

From Swami's picture frame, on the shrine about 8m in front of me, both His Hands emerged, reaching out to me in a dusty haze of light. His arms were a translucent orange, stretching ethereally toward me until it felt like a warm glow firmly placed on the top of my head. Swami's Hands remained on my head for approximately 30 seconds. During this time, I blinked my eyes forcefully and turned my head left and right in an effort to shake off what I initially thought were my eyes playing tricks on me. But when there was no change to the vision, I succumbed to these Divine Hands of Light upon me. Then, I melted, crying uncontrollably. That was the moment I understood, fully understood, that Swami knows everything. Even when I have doubted, He has been there for me, giving me the strength to carry on. It is our thoughts that can make us or break us. Swami placing His Hands on my head was a signal to control my mind, to banish my doubts, and to fill my head with only positive, divine thoughts, despite the external circumstances.

A few months later I was blessed with another mystical experience. I had the habit of setting an alarm at regular intervals through the night to enable me to check on Yuventha. This particular night however, I was woken not by the alarm, but by a vision of Swami standing at the foot of my bed. His black hair and orange robe glowed in a halo of light as He walked by my bedside. I can only assume that my beloved Swami also had the habit of checking in on Yuventha on His nightly rounds. And I was so grateful that He allowed me to 'catch Him in the act.'

In 2016, we finally had the opportunity to visit Prashanthi Nilayam, which was a completely overwhelming experience. Not only did it feel like I had just come home, but I could also feel Swami's presence so strongly, that when I prostrated at His tomb, I was blinded by my tears. What was even more incredulous was that all the songs I listen to at home were sung during my first bhajan session in the Sai Kulwant Hall - in the exact order that I play them at home! Yes, Swami knew I was visiting, and so He arranged a special musical reception for me! If it weren't for my tears (not to mention the ashram rules) I would probably have gotten up to dance with bliss.

The Love of our Lord is like no other. He not only orchestrated that we enjoy our trip, but also that Yuventha would only fall ill the day after we arrived back in SA. She had to be admitted into ICU after contracting another infection as she was frequently prone to do. But Yuventha pulled through it, like many other infections. Despite the specialists advising us that she would only likely live to 16, we had 33 beautiful years with her. But on 15 May 2024, after a bout of pneumonia, our beloved Yuventha officially obtained her angel wings, and passed from this world. It was through her that I learnt about compassion and understanding. She taught me to see God in everyone. She taught me what it's like to live with a heart that is completely open and pure.

Three days after her passing, I somewhat unwillingly visited a psychic. But when the psychic mentioned things that no one else could have known, I sat up attentively. She asked me to close my eyes and to describe what I saw... There, in my mind's eye, I was given a very clear vision of Yuventha's beautiful little face upon Swami's

Divine Face, both faces surrounded by His hair, and dressed in white. With her signature smile upon her face, Yuventha glowed with the beauty of holiness. I knew immediately that my child was with my Lord.

I light a blue candle for Yuventha every day. And I talk to Swami, my Best Friend, frequently in the picture that He reached out to me from. I live as a woman and a mother, who has been strengthened by her pain, not broken by it. I live with a heart full of gratitude.

And I live always listening for the music.
Play on, my dear Swami. Play on!

REENA PILLAY, 61
REDHILL, DURBAN

40. ONE MOMENT IN TIME

2010 was a challenging year for us, as we had lost my grandmother, the matriarch of our family. So when we were invited to be a part of the South African Ubuntu pilgrimage, it felt like the cure we needed. I travelled with my father, two aunts, and two friends, on a journey that would turn out to be a life-changing experience for us all.

From the moment we arrived at the ashram, every day was magical. We lived and breathed Swami. Seeing Him every day would result in us falling in love with Him, every single time we laid eyes on Him.

On the day of the Ubuntu production, 28 September 2010, I was supposed to be in the 4th row. But, through good fortune, I somehow ended up in the 2nd row. I was so excited and filled with anticipation. But we waited… and waited… and waited for Swami to emerge. Our hearts were breaking because we began to think that He was not going to come. Eventually we saw Swami being wheeled through the crowds on His wheelchair.

Oh my God! We were filled with such joy… amazement… wonder…. love. Our emotions were just overflowing. It was nothing short of blissful.

As Swami approached us, a few ladies from behind handed me letters to pass over to Swami. I hadn't written a letter myself, but I held their letters towards Him, enjoying the privilege of my 2nd row position, which felt so up close and personal. As Swami came past in His wheelchair, there was a fleeting moment… when He looked right at me… into me… through me… with His Shiva eyes… I was filled.

I can assure you that fleeting moment was unforgettable. It filled my life, my soul, my every want, my every desire, my everything. It was one moment in time, that for me, would last a lifetime.

I leaned forward with the letters in my hand, hoping that Swami would take them. Instead, Swami in His wheelchair went casually by. Perhaps He didn't receive the letters because they were the letters of others, whereas that moment had been ours, and ours alone? I don't know. But, with our moment ended, and Swami passing by, I found myself looking down at His Feet. They were soft, beautiful and delicate, and now indelibly imprinted in my mind's eye.

The whole pilgrimage experience in 2010, with all the Sai devotees from South Africa, my friends, my family – it was all so incredibly empowering. There was a palpable sense of togetherness and love. I know that all those who participated would wish to have that time back again. Although Swami is no longer with us in His Physical Form, He is here with us, always. We just need to keep concentrating on the precious memories, filling our lives with His love, and living what He taught us.

When we returned from India, my dad surprised me with a photo – a photo that captures my moment with the Divine, as I reached out to Him with letters in my hand. *(Refer: Image i)*

Through it, my moment lasts forever.

PRELEEN KANTHAPERSAD, 46
BLUFF, DURBAN

My Love!

The great joy, the subtlety of the bliss that you will feel as you come closer and closer to your Real Self.

If you strive to find your Self by using your mind, you will strive and strive in vain. Because the mind cannot give you the truth; a lie cannot give you the truth; a lie can only entangle you in a web of deceit.

But if you sensitise yourself, awaken your true, fine, beautiful qualities.

Baba[20]

OM SRI SAI ASAHAYA SAHAYAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Helper of the Helpless and Refuge of the Refugeless

41. A SNAKE, A ROSE, AND TWO HUSBANDS

1991 was the year when people began flocking to see the miracles of Grasmere Road. I was one of those people. I was in search of comfort. And I found my Swami.

Shortly thereafter, my daughter Simone was born. Even as a baby, I would take her with me to the Grasmere ashram, which became my second home. But in 1998-99, I lost both my in-laws and my father, and life took a difficult turn for us. My dear husband struggled to come to terms with the loss of his parents. He was then retrenched, and his depression only worsened. He stopped coming to satsang and sometimes, especially when under the influence of alcohol, we would get into arguments. One evening, after I had just returned from the Grasmere Sai ashram, we got into an argument in the kitchen of our home. On the wall, I had a large photo in three parts - Swami, Shiva, and a Snake. During the argument, my husband made a remark that upset me, in response to which I muttered, *"My Swami will take care of it."* The next morning, while we were all getting ready for school and work, my husband was the first to leave the house. As he walked up the stairs, with a lit cigarette in his mouth, he came face to face with a large brown snake standing erect, as if ready to strike. He turned and ran back down to the house at lightning speed. As I was still upset, I showed little interest in the shenanigans. It was only after Simone confirmed that there was indeed a snake standing erect at the top of the stairs, that I went to go and check for myself. But when I got there, there was nothing. The snake was never to be seen again! I smile when I recall the hundred calls I received from my husband that day, just checking to see if I was alright. I know without a shadow of doubt that was the Snake from the photo in my kitchen, and it appeared to strike only a point: that God is always listening to our conversations, and that He will always take care of His devotees. Even though my husband lost his way for a while, he was also Swami's devotee. Lord Shiva's snake which represents energy and consciousness, perhaps helped to set right his own mental energy. Because by the time my husband passed in 2020, he had found his way back to our Swami.

Swami has always been there to protect us.

Once in 2003, 12-year-old Simone and I were forced to walk home after satsang. It was around 21h00 and it was very dark. As we made our way down the ashram driveway, a handful of pink and white almond sweets and cachous scattered around our feet. We gathered them up gratefully, comforted by the signal of Swami's Presence. But we were still fearful of the walk home. The route involved going down Road 502 which is known to be a den for thugs, so much so that I even picked up a stick for protection. But as we walked, the usual 'thugs' greeted us with *"Sai Ram."* Then a car drove up alongside and began to follow us. While I was initially alarmed by this, the driver, who had a mop of black bushy hair, said *"Aunty, don't be scared. I'm from Sudha Mandir."* Road 502 is a long road and the walk home took about 20 minutes, but this car with its strange driver stayed with us all the way. As we approached our home, it became bright as day, and only when we entered our gates, did we notice that the car had simply disappeared. I had been praying constantly, *"Swami, please take us home safely."* While in my mind, I will never know for sure, my heart tells me that the Lord Himself lit up our way and escorted us home.

You see, everything is Swami for me. It's all just Swami, Swami, Swami!

I never got to see the Physical Form of Sai Baba, but in 2012 I was blessed to visit Prashanthi Nilayam as part of a group permitted to put up a fruit display in the Sai Kulwant Hall. I did not know how I was going to afford such a journey, but somehow, the money became available. I was also suffering from a frozen shoulder at the time, which was so bad that I couldn't even lift a loaf of bread. It was only with the help of others, and by slowly pushing my luggage, that I was able to endure the journey to Prashanthi. On our first night, I prayed to Swami

to please help me as I feared that I would not be of any use in putting up the fruit display as planned. That night I was awakened by the sight of a very faint light. Then, I felt as if my arm was being gripped. It was a distinct firm pressure bearing down and pulling on the arm. *"Why are you pulling my arm?"* I asked the Sai sister sleeping next to me. *"I am not pulling it,"* she replied. When the sensation subsided, I fell asleep again. But the next morning, my frozen shoulder was gone, and my arm was fully functional again.

I love Swami 24/7. He has taken care of all my needs.

When I needed to buy a house after my husband passed and I kept losing out to other purchasers who either made better or quicker offers, I began to feel very deflated. But one evening, on the way back from satsang, I spotted a house with a 'For Sale' board. I ended up putting an offer on the house and writing a letter to Swami, which I left at the Grasmere Road shrine. It read: *"Om Sai Ram. I love you Swami. I've seen a house which I love. If I am going to get this house, please bless this letter. If I am not going to get the house, please don't bless this letter. Thank you Swami."* Swami blessed the letter. But I lost the bid… A month passed and the house was seemingly sold to someone else. Still, something in me didn't lose faith. After all, Swami had said that I would get the house, so I knew I would… And I did... Because the other buyer's bond application eventually failed!

What Swami blesses, will always come to pass. But one has to be very precise when asking for signs of His blessing - otherwise it can get quite confusing…

Like in 2010, when Simone was in matric, we took all her books to the Grasmere shrine for blessing just before her trial exams. Well, Swami blessed all her books, except… maths. We didn't understand it at the time. Every book had been blessed, even pages within the books were covered in vibuthi. Simone interpreted these to mean 'exam tips' from the Lord, and she would focus her revision on these sections. And she was right to do so, because every one of those blessed sections appeared in her exams. As for maths, we simply thought that perhaps Swami had gotten tired (after all, so many youngsters had brought their books for His blessing). But when she took her maths text book back for a second 'try', there was still no vibuthi. Of course, Simone still had to write her trial exams, and when she did so, she performed extremely well in all her papers, except… maths! Only then did we understand what Swami had meant. No-vibuthi was His signal that this was the subject she needed to pay particular attention to. In the month between her trial and final exams, Simone worked very hard at maths and with Swami's Grace, passed all her final papers with flying colours.

Even when we don't understand Him, or forget Him, Swami never leaves our side.

As a little child, Simone would suffer bad bouts of wheezing. After one of those wheezing episodes, she took a tablet that had been dispensed at RK Khan Hospital. We did not know that she would be allergic to it... When her eyes began to bulge and her tongue hung out of her mouth, we knew something was terribly wrong. With the help of some of the neighbourhood boys, we rushed her back to the hospital at 14h00, only to be told to *"Wait in line!"* Despite our repeated pleas for help, we waited in line, ignored by the nurses, for 4,5 hours! With the other patients supporting us, Simone was eventually put on a stretcher while we begged for a doctor or nurse to attend to her. In desperation, at 18h30, I cried out, *"Swami, where are You?"* Almost immediately, a nurse responded, and a doctor was called who then gave Simone the necessary injection. Simone responded instantly to the shot. Just like Swami responded instantly to my call. You see, for those 4,5 hours, I had been holding out for the doctors and nurses to help us. As a result, I became increasingly frustrated. But, when I eventually turned to Swami, even in my frustration, He responded. He was always in control. And He chose the exact right moment to teach me a valuable lesson.

Just like the moment He chose to prove Himself to Simone's husband, who was always sceptical about Sai Baba. While he would accompany her to satsang, he felt more inclined to worship other Hindu deities such as Lord Muruga. One evening after bhajans, a devotee gave him a white rose from the Grasmere shrine.

My son-in-law accepted the kind gesture gracefully and placed the rose at the shrine in his little shop. Several days passed and the rose was forgotten. But one morning, Simone prayed: *"Swami, please can you give my husband a sign that You are God."* Later, when her husband went to open his shop, what he saw astounded him (no, it was not a snake). The rose at the shrine which only he tends to, was covered in manja. That simple sign by Swami was enough to ensure that my son-in-law is now the first one out of the house on satsang days!

Swami's ways are mysterious. Only He knows whether it should be a snake, or manja. Whether to bless a house, or not to bless a book. Whether to heal a shoulder, or to wait on a doctor to do so.

Whatever Swami chooses for us, He knows exactly what we need to learn, and when. And we love Him always.

SANDRA RAJKOMAR (59) & SIMONE NAIDOO (33)
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN

42. OUR REAL RICHES

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." - Luke 6:20

I grew up poor. But that never bothered me, because even as a child, I was more spiritually than materially inclined. Perhaps it was because I was the eighth child to my parents, much like Krishna and Swami were to theirs. When I got married, life wasn't much easier because my husband struggled with alcohol and unfortunately lost his job early in our lives. I was therefore forced to raise three children on a meager income working at a clothing store in town. Our young family would move frequently living in the basements and garages of peoples' homes as this was all the rent we could afford. Even though I didn't hanker after material things, I did yearn for a home to call our own - one where my children could focus on their studying which was very important to me. So, one day I prayed to Swami to please find us a home. That afternoon, I saw an advertisement on a bus as it drove past calling for applicants for new homes in Newlands West. With only R5000 saved in my bank account, I wondered whether we would be able to afford it. When I enquired, I was overjoyed to discover that the cost of home ownership was R4800.

After moving into our new home, I set about ensuring that our children obtained a good education and were firmly on the spiritual path. I may not have been able to give them much in terms of luxuries, but I felt rich because I knew they were definitely God's children. Unlike many other siblings, my three children got on very well and hardly ever fought amongst themselves. However, almost as if to reinforce the point that the material world is not important, over the years our home was burgled eight times. With Swami's Grace however, none of us ever came to any harm, because we were mostly never present at the time of the incidents. These burglaries have served to remind me, repeatedly, that this material world is a temporary one. And that we will never be able to take our 'things' with us to the next world. In the end, even our bodies are reduced to ashes, so our focus must rather always be on the soul that lies within.

Once a family friend was visiting Prashanthi Nilayam and asked what I would like them to bring back for me. My response was to ask for just a little bit of the earth upon which Swami has stood. So, my friend returned with a 500g packet of sand from Swami's ashram, apparently from the ground around the Krishna statue. I examined the package gratefully, before wrapping it up and packing it away carefully in a safe place. My intention was to pour the sand into the foundations of the homes my three children may one day build for themselves. But in July 2002, my own foundation was to be rocked forever…

The morning after Guru Purnima, I rushed off to work leaving all the jewellery I had worn for the previous evening's function, on the ironing board. When I returned home that afternoon, I returned to a home that had been completely ransacked and all our valuables missing, including my thali, mangalsutra, rings and earrings. With my husband away in Kosi Bay, my three children rushed to my aid, providing both emotional comfort and physical support. Even my youngest son Kribalan and his wife drove from Eshowe to stay with me that weekend. Yes, having your hard-earned belongings taken from you is a difficult experience, but when I look back, I can see how that burglary provided me with my last weekend of togetherness with my son, who was the real treasure taken from me…

A week after the burglary, Kribalan was killed in a motor vehicle accident while transporting school-children on an excursion to the Drakensberg. He was 23 years old.

His death broke me… But it never broke my faith.

I survived by focusing only on doing Swami's work.
One day at a time.
One duty at a time.
To the best of my ability.
Always.

Then, one day, something happened to prove to me how our beloved Swami is always there for us. A friend, who was in the process of building her home, asked me to please perform the foundation prayers. Before going to the site, I retrieved my carefully wrapped packet of earth from Prashanthi which had been given to me 18 years prior. I still wanted to save some of the sand for my children if ever they needed it, so I put my hand into the packet with the intention of taking out a handful for my friend's foundation. But in the midst of the sand, I felt something small, hard and heavy. For a split second, I was like Swami, when He used to 'pull out' objects from the sands of the Chitravathi River. But in my case, it was a packet of sand from the hallowed grounds of Prashanthi Nilayam, out of which emerged… a ring. It had simple engravings, and a picture of Swami in the middle. I was shocked! I put the ring on my finger, and it fit me perfectly! That priceless ring, sent by the Compassionate Lord when all of mine was taken, is all the jewellery I need for this life. Even to this day, my special ring continues to fit me perfectly, though I only wear it on special occasions, because I don't want to risk losing it with all the washing that I do. *(Refer: Images j & k)*

I know in my heart that no matter how much one suffers early in one's life, or no matter how materially poor we may be, we will always be blessed in the end, so long as we do good, and be good. Every day, I try to live soul-to-soul, serving whomever I meet with the little that I have.

And I know that in Swami's Eyes, I am rich.

THAVARANGENI GOVENDER, 72
NEWLANDS WEST, DURBAN

My dear!

The harder the circumstances, the more trying the environments, the stronger are the men who come out of those circumstances. So welcome all these outside troubles and anxieties.

When the bubble bursts, it finds itself the whole ocean. You are the whole, the infinite, the all. Out of long churning, this milk of the world becomes butter and this butter is God.

With Love

Baba[21]

OM SRI SAI LOKA BANDHAVAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is Kith & Kin to the Whole World

43. NEVER ALONE

On 23 May 2018 at 06h15 my husband, who was 46 years old at the time, suffered a mild stroke. With only the two of us in Abu Dhabi, with my parents and siblings in New Zealand, and with my husband's family still in South Africa, we had absolutely no family support at all. We also did not want to trouble them, so we chose to keep our ordeal to ourselves. Little did we realise that the months and years that lay ahead of us, would hold the biggest trials of our lives, and that we would have to navigate them, alone.

A short while after the stroke, my husband was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD), which affected both his kidneys. Then, while being treated for CKD, doctors found that he had other underlying medical conditions. So much so, that visits to the doctor became a nightmare - with every visit, there was a new diagnosis. Our life felt like it was falling apart.

In 2021, he became critically ill with pneumonia and ended up in the ICU. A few months later, he had to have his spleen removed. But the trials didn't end there… Amidst my husband's health challenges, my dad suffered a fatal heart attack. To make matters worse, I could not attend the funeral because of New Zealand's strict COVID lockdown. We were heartbroken. This was the most difficult period in our lives.

A few days after my dad passed, I had a dream in which I saw both Swami and my dad. Swami told me to stop crying because my dad was with Him. This brought me some comfort. In fact, it was only my faith in Swami which kept me going. Even though it was an extremely stressful and challenging time for us, Swami gave us the strength to go on. I would just pray continuously to our beloved Baba for His guidance and healing, and Swami was always there, in some manner or form, to carry us through.

My husband went on to require dialysis three times a week, which has its own challenges. Even though he was on the organ donors list, in the United Arab Emirates, there are unfortunately so many CKD cases that getting a donor is virtually impossible. However, what was 'unusual' about my husband's case, is that unlike other advanced CKD sufferers who usually cannot even go to work, he was still working and essentially living a normal life. Even though his medical condition was deteriorating, he remained very positive. I am convinced that this could only have been through Swami's Grace.

I started doing the Sai Vrat pooja continuously. Chanting daily and listening to Swami's discourses and bhajans was all we could do. As my husband and I have different blood groups, I was not a suitable donor match. So we had to keep on trying to find a donor for him. Every day, I would pray to Swami for His help.

Then in December 2024, a 'Sai-incidence' began to unfold...

My husband was introduced to an Indian gentleman working at the Dubai airport. They began chatting and during the conversation my husband mentioned that he needed a kidney. This gentleman was not only a registered organ donor, but he also immediately offered up his kidney. We were very apprehensive about this, but the man insisted. One month prior, the UAE had changed their organ transplant rules. It was now permissible for non-relatives and persons of any nationality to be an organ donor, provided all the medical requirements were met.

In January 2025, my husband and the donor initiated the process, and the transplant was approved by the Organ Transplant Committee of the UAE. Both had to undergo a battery of tests, all of which were successful. An operating slot opened up for the surgical team, and on 11 February, the kidney transplant was performed.

My husband is now fully recovered and back at work. A month after the surgery, our lifesaving donor returned to India. When I asked him why he was leaving, he simply replied with a smile: *"My job is now done. I need to return home."* For me, my husband has been given a second chance in life. This is my miracle from Swami.

For as long as Swami is in our lives, and no matter where we may be in the world, we will never be alone.

THERGIE NAIDOO, 51
ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

44. SWAMI TAKES CARE OF THE MINUTEST DETAILS

It was in November 1998 that a family friend, Rodney, asked me to accompany him to Prasanthi. But I wasn't keen to go. On the one hand, I didn't have the money, and on the other, I didn't want to leave my family alone. But, as most Sai devotees can attest, when Swami wills an outcome, it will always come to pass.

A few days later, another family friend, Vassie, visited. During our casual conversation, I told him about not wanting to go to Prashanthi because I was not comfortable with leaving my family alone. But Vassie was adamant – I had to go; and he would take care of my family in my absence. Furthermore, Rodney offered to purchase my ticket and I could repay him at a later stage. With these so-called obstacles being removed so swiftly, I could only interpret it as a firm 'call' from Swami, and so I agreed to embark on the trip.

One day, while in Prasanthi, I called home to chat to my family in South Africa. My son answered. When I asked to speak to my wife, he somewhat reluctantly informed me that she had gone to a funeral. *"Who's funeral?"* I asked, growing concerned. *"Uncle Vassie's,"* he replied softly.

After getting over the shock of having lost my dear friend, I then began to lambast Swami for my own pitiful state. *"How could You do that, Swami? Vassie was supposed to be taking care of my family. He was my only support structure."* Of course, at that stage, I could not see the error in my thinking, but once my mind became a little calmer, I prayed to Swami and told Him that as soon as I returned to South Africa, I would offer flowers and agarbathi at Vassie's grave, in gratitude and in honour of his memory.

Shortly after my return home, my wife and I went to the grave. En route, I realised that I had neglected to buy the flowers. *"Never mind,"* I thought. *"We can buy it at the cemetery."* But, when we got there, the flower sellers were already closed. I didn't think it was too big a deal, and as we were already there, we proceeded anyway to the grave site. My wife led the way, and I followed.

When we were a few steps away from Vassie's grave, a beautiful, large, pink rose suddenly appeared in my wife's hands. She stopped dead in her tracks, astounded. As for me, I just looked at her, dumbfounded. We offered the Divine Rose at my dear friend Vassie's resting place. And as we said our prayers, there was much for me to reflect on.

- Living in this world can indeed cause us much anxiety. While having a support system is important, in the end, we will always have to rely on our Greatest Support, God. He is closer to us than any family or friend.

- When we pray and make a commitment, we must always honour it. Not only did Swami demonstrate that He had indeed heard my prayer, but He also honoured the commitment on my behalf! Manifesting the rose in my wife's hand, as opposed to my own, was perhaps His way of teaching me a good lesson.

Swami is the very consciousness within us. He is therefore aware of every minute detail of our lives. And He will always come to our aid, to teach, guide and support us, as we journey to Him.

KENNY (66) & SAIESWARI (62) GOVENDER
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN

"Whereas your own father and mother are attached to you through Nir-bandham (inescapable obligation), I am attached to you through Sam-bandham (willingly undertaken obligation)."

If you have no one with you, do not believe that you are alone. Baba is with you! You have only to remember Him. Call on Him![22]

OM SRI SAI SADHU VARDANAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Fosters Goodness

45. NINE SEATS FOR NINE BROTHERS

The nine of us walked towards the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, our white clothes cleaned and neatly pressed, our hearts thumping with excitement…

At the previous day's interview, Swami had invited us to meet with Him again at the Institute. We were elated. It was the 31st July 1997, and the First World Youth Conference had just drawn to an end.

… So here we were, a group of nine preened Sai brothers being ushered in by Dr Michael Goldstein, who was then Chair of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation. He pointed us to our seats, and said: *"Several months ago, Swami told me to reserve 9 seats for the opening of the Institute. I did not know who the 9 seats were for - until now."* We were overwhelmed by the omniscience and the magnanimity of the Avatar who had planned this moment for us, months in advance.

In order to answer the question, "Why", I need to rewind my story a little. You see I have been privileged to be a part of a male youth group from Chatsworth Region One which was formed almost 30 years ago. This group initiated many seva projects, and more importantly helped many of our brothers on their path of personal growth and self-transformation. For those that were a part of it, the group was a way of life. Saturday mornings began at 05h30 with study circle and meetings, which brought us all together to learn about His teachings and to help each other with the challenges we faced as young people. We also spent many hours doing seva which often involved hard physical labour. But the truth was that it did not feel like hard work. We had two secret ingredients - humour and food!

We kept spirituality light, and without any **'castor oil faces.'** This we learnt from Swami who, at all our interviews, would go out of His way to break the ice and make us feel comfortable. In fact, many of us still use humour to this day, in business and in work, helping to break the ice and make colleagues feel comfortable. As for food, this has been a tradition that has stood the test of time, with our mothers and partners always sustaining the group with a sumptuous spread. Now, decades later, we can acknowledge that food is meant to be the medicine for the disease of hunger, and that we must put a ceiling on those desires, even if it's for tin roof ice cream!

When Swami told us that recycling was **'good for now and good for always',** we tried our best to continue with our recycling project. Even if it required building our own trailer to transport huge hessian sacks from depot to depot, in our overalls and thick gloves, fishing out bones from paper and glass, draining oil from cans, come rain or shine. There were no excuses at all, because we enjoyed it, and we never missed a day.

Swami also advised us not to stop our work at Clairwood Hospital because this was **'good seva'.** We started by visiting the patients and distributing magazines and treats, then progressed to hosting special Christmas programmes for the children. Soon this morphed into cutting hair and supporting the hospital with any need they could not fulfil, such as being on standby to clean the kitchen during the union strikes.

These were just two of the many projects we were involved in. To recharge our batteries, we would bask in the love of Swami in Prashanthi each year. And we were blessed with 3 interviews with the Lord - in 1996,1997 and 1999. One month before each pilgrimage, we would begin our daily sadhana routine. Once in the Holy Land, we would stick together, never once wandering outside in the village except for necessities. We did not socialise with others at all – even sometimes earning the reputation of being 'snobs'. We would wake at 02h30 each morning to be first in the token line. We walked in single file from darshan, to the canteen, to our rooms.

In Sai Kulwant Hall, we would not waste time talking, but rather prayed silently to the Lord, who always humoured us by taking all our letters, asking us when we came, and when we were leaving. Then after darshan, we would sit silently for 20 minutes meditating and visualising His Form.

It was this discipline as youth that we knew Swami valued. Of course, Swami laughed at us when we referred to ourselves as a youth group. **"After marriage, not youth",** He said. When we took months to prepare a detailed information booklet about all our projects and lovingly offered it to Him at our 1999 interview, He again laughed lovingly and said, **"I am not interested in information. I want your transformation."** And that was the bottom line… Our transformation! It wasn't about what we did outwardly at all. It was about whether or not we had experienced an inner transformation.

To help me with my own transformation journey, at the interview in 1997, Swami materialised a Shirdi Sai ring for me and placed it on my right hand forefinger. At our interview in 1999, Swami asked to see my hand, and blessed the ring again. After all this time, the ring still fits me perfectly, and remains on the forefinger where Swami placed it.

He spoke with us about many things during the course of our interviews. But some of His utterances that have impacted me the most over the course of my life include:

- **Do not waste Food, Time, Money and Energy. All are God.**
- **Help Ever Hurt Never**
- **See no evil. See what is good. Speak no evil. Speak what is good. Do no evil. Do what is good**.

His Divine Discourse delivered at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute Of Higher Learning, the one for which special seats had been reserved for us, also held some pointed lessons for our development. These included:

- Man has so many desires – there is no greater misery than desire and attachment.
- Man wants happiness – there is no greater happiness than sacrifice.
- Everything is Divine – recognize unity in divinity. Everything is God's work.
- Students need intelligence and broadmindedness. Develop broadmindedness to experience Divinity You can be successful in society through broadmindedness.
- Modern education does not foster virtue and character. Education without character is useless. Education is not for earning a living. Education is for wisdom.
- Birds, bees and animals, with no worldly knowledge, have discipline. But man, despite his education, has no discipline. Observe discipline and do your duty. Devotion will not be successful without discipline and duty.
- The body has a return date. Death is certain. Be ready for it always. The world is a passing cloud, so do good whenever you can.
- Cultivate love for God. Concentrate on God. He will protect you, no matter where you are.

At the conclusion of His discourse, Swami exhorted us to: **"Make your lives sacred. Swami blesses you."** This is my prayer every day - to make my humble life a sacred one. So as to be a worthy recipient of the blessings of our beloved Sai.

NIVESH SINGH, 49
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN

46. LIFE LESSONS FROM MY LIFE STAGES

I was 10 years old when I learned my first significant lesson, after a visit to Prashanthi Nilayam. My aunt had just been diagnosed with lupus, and I knew it was serious because my dad had stopped drinking, almost as a petition to Swami. When we got to the ashram, dad encouraged us to write letters because we had heard that it increases your chances of interaction with Swami. But there was really nothing I wanted, so all I could write about was my aunt. In my letter, I told Swami that she wasn't well (as if He didn't already know) and asked Him to please materialize vibuthi for her. My entire letter, which I folded into a heart-shape, was about my aunt. Unfortunately, every time I carried my letter with me, I had no opportunity to hand it to Swami. Then, on the one occasion that we got row 1 for darshan, I forgot my letter in the room! Dad tried to convince me to run and get it, but I was not budging. *"Swami anyway knows what I wrote,"* I argued. The darshan music then started, and Swami emerged from His quarters. My eyes were fixed on Him as He walked amongst the ladies and then toward the men. Throughout my perfect view of the Lord, I pleaded with Him in my head: *"Swami, please, please, please Swami! Please give me vibuthi for my aunt. It will only be for her. I promise I won't take any for myself!"* Nobody knew the contents of my letter, and nobody knew the silent bargaining taking place in my head. Then, Swami walked straight up to us, waved His Hand and poured vibuthi into the palm of my elder brother to my right, into my own up-turned palm, and lastly into the palm of my father to my left. I was overjoyed. As Swami walked away, the only thought that came over me was, *"How do I explain to dad and Ana that this vibuthi is not for us?"* People began to jostle for the slightest speck of vibuthi around us, but my father leaned over and firmly instructed us not to take any of the vibuthi, but to save it for our aunt. I was so relieved. But I was also in awe - we had all shared the same thoughts and intentions. When we returned home, we gave my aunt all the vibuthi, as well as my letter. I am convinced that it was Swami's vibuthi that nullified the doctors' predictions that my aunt would live only five more years. This incident shaped my young mind profoundly. When a request is made to the Lord that is completely selfless, filled with nothing but innocence and love, Swami is quick to respond.

However, as I grew into a young man, my desires began to increase, and my life became far more self-absorbing. After graduating in 2006, I couldn't find a job in Durban for six months. My passion was game programming and as I had done my honours in computer graphics, I felt that there would be greater opportunities for me abroad. So I applied for a working visa to the UK, but when my application was turned down, I began to feel very depressed. My brother then stepped in and organised an interview for a job located in Johannesburg. Encouraged by my girlfriend who hinted that I needed to get out from the 'comfort' of home, I went for the interview and got the job. But it was a job involving 14-hour shifts developing custom software for billing and inventory management systems. For the next nine months, I had no time for anything else, not even to attend bhajans.

And when the same girlfriend who had convinced me to relocate, broke up with me, my decline accelerated. I had envisioned a bright future for myself, but it was slowly going up in smoke. Not only was I feeling sorry for myself, but I was also confused as to what to do next - would resigning and handing in my two-weeks' notice mean that I was nothing more than a spoilt child? I was miserable and exhausted; I was not motivated and had no goals; and my life felt completely out of balance. However, there was one thing that still made perfect sense to me - Swami's work. So, I surrendered to Swami. I told Him that I no longer knew what I wanted for myself, and that He must therefore take over. All I wanted was to do His work. Then, I had a dream…

I was seated amongst others in a circle, seemingly at a bhajan practice. Also in the circle was Swami, who turned to me and said **"Two-weeks! Burn."** While I am uncertain about the meaning of 'burn' as it could have been a reference to my job or some karma, I was unequivocal about the 'two-weeks'. I handed in my notice

immediately and packed up for Durban. It was during the drive back home that I felt, for the very first time, that I was actually doing something on my own and which carried the blessing of Swami.

Even when a light popped up on my dashboard indicating 'Engine Failure', I remained unfazed and simply took in the scenery as I drove to the vehicle dealership. I felt like my life was finally beginning, because Swami was now at the steering wheel. The next Thursday, my mother organized a hawan at home, after which she brought me the tiniest newspaper clipping from the Classifieds, which turned out to be an advertisement for a game programming job. I was shocked to find such an opportunity in Durban, and immediately submitted my application. The next morning, I received a call from the company which turned out to be one of only two in the world that built mining simulators. I interviewed for the job on the Monday morning. And I started work on Tuesday! Staying true to my commitment to do Swami's work, that Friday, I took my harmonium and headed off to bhajan practice at the Durban North Sai Centre, where I had been actively involved as a harmonium player before leaving to Johannesburg. Little did I realise that I was actually walking into a centre meeting where a bhajan convenor was being sought. Without saying a single word for the entire meeting, I was elected to the position of bhajan convenor. Within one week, I got one of the most fun and fulfilling jobs I have ever had, and I acquired a leadership role which would chart my course within the Sai organization.

This period shaped me in several significant ways. I learned that when we want something really badly, we can become too attached to it. And if we are too attached to it, we cannot enjoy it. But the moment we detach from it, that's when we become qualified to have it. The same learning applied to my relationships. For many years in my youth, I had been seeking companionship, but after two failed relationships, I was done. Then, when I found that I no longer wanted to get married, that's when Swami stepped in and sent the one who would be my perfect match and walk the spiritual path with me. Swami has said: **"You do my work, and I'll do yours."** When I put Him first, He showed me the path and fulfilled all of my needs, because I was prepared to accept whatever outcome He chose for me.

Now, into my middle age, Swami taught me another key lesson. I was caught up at work one day and ended up being late to collect my grandmother who had been discharged from hospital. I found myself speeding to get to her, driving at over 160km/h. I was caught by a speed trap and pulled over by a traffic cop who questioned the reason for my speeding. I tried to respond, but quickly realised how lame and unbelievable my excuse sounded: *"My grandmother is in hospital...!"* The female cop asked if I knew that I was driving at a speed for which I could be arrested. I nodded. I knew that what I had done was very wrong. In my mind, I said to Swami that I was prepared to accept the consequences for my wrongdoing. If making it right meant that I had to be locked up, then so be it. The next moment, the cop said, *"No, you're too young for a criminal record. I'll give you a fine instead. Are you prepared to pay the maximum fine for your offence?"* I don't know if she was trying to solicit a bribe, but I did know that I was not going to offer it. I told her that I had no choice and was prepared to pay the maximum fine for my offence. I have no idea what went through her mind next, because the fine she wrote up for me was for R250. That was the last time I drove so recklessly. This simple incident taught me that we will inevitably make mistakes in our lives. But when we sincerely try to correct our missteps, our compassionate Swami will come to our aid.

These are just some of the lessons that have shaped the various stages of my life - a life that I consider blessed simply because I know and love Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

My prayer is simply for that love to grow stronger, until there are no stages left…

EESAN MOODLEY, 41
MOUNT EDGECOMBE, DURBAN

47. HANDS THAT HELP, TO LIFT UP THE LORD

I have always believed in God. But as opposed to sitting and praying and chanting mantras, I would rather use my hands and be useful through the work that I do. That's how I choose to serve God.

I was a little boy when my family began to pray to Sai Baba. It was driven by my grandmother who started us out by first ensuring we all fasted on Thursdays. She would return from her trips to India with little statues and rings of Sai Baba – one of which was given to me. As a young man, I wore this ring unquestioningly. Until… one of my fishing trips. I was just about to bait the hook, when I noticed that my ring had disappeared! It had completely vanished off my thick, wide fingers. Not only did this signal to me that I was using my hands to do something very wrong, but it also cemented my belief that Sai Baba was far more than a Guru. He was an Omnipresent, Omniscient Being.

Later, in my thirties, I had a dream in which a grand function was taking place in a stadium, where many people were awaiting the arrival of Swami. The organiser of the event turned to four men, including myself, and requested that we bring Swami to the stage as soon as He arrived. However, we were to ensure that Swami did not have to walk! So when Swami arrived, the four of us interlocked our hands to make a seat, and Swami proceeded to sit on our forearms most comfortably. We then carried a smiling Swami all the way to the stage!

Of course, at the time, this dream did not make much sense to me. But with hindsight, it has come to exemplify two core beliefs that I hold, and which have guided me in my life. Firstly, from planting trees to washing floors to cleaning toilets, no work is beneath me. We cannot wait for others to do what is needed; we must be prepared to do it ourselves. And secondly, we must be prepared to work together. Office bearers in the Sai organization must especially be prepared to set the example, because only then can Swami be glorified. Through this dream, Swami had demonstrated to me that, by using my hands, together with others, I was able to bring God to the forefront.

It was always my dream to visit Prashanthi Nilayam after my children had completed their education. The 2010 South African pilgrimage arose at exactly that time, and so we signed up for it. Unfortunately, our company shuts over December, which meant that I had to take unpaid leave in order to join the pilgrimage, which was taking place in September. When we arrived at the ashram, I became really desperate for Swami to give me some small sign that He knew I was there, amongst the many thousands of devotees present. The next morning I awoke to discover a little bit of vibuthi on my name tag, inside the plastic sleeve! This was my 'small sign'- not enough for others to see, but just enough to confirm that He indeed knew I was there!

It was a wonderfully memorable experience which included doing seva in the western canteen. On the last afternoon, all the South Africans assembled together in regions before lining up for darshan. My region, the North Coast Region, was the last line, and I knew this meant that we would be sitting right in the back. But when we entered the mandir, an elderly sevadal instructed me to *"Sit here!"* He was known to be a cheeky man, so I obeyed without question. It turned out to be a seat in the second row, along the passage, with a sevadal's cushion in front of me. I could not believe my good fortune, which only got better, because the sevadal for whom the cushion was assigned, never showed up. So when Swami made His appearance, I got to move to the front row.

It is hard to describe the joy one experiences being merely one tile away from God. But the truth is, I don't think I saw Swami as clearly as I could have… because of my tears. They flowed like a river! And when Swami looked in our direction, I was so choked up, I could not get a word out.

But I know that words were not necessary. Because I talk to Swami all the time. He is the Father to whom I turn for guidance, whenever I have a challenge.

He is the Guiding Light in my Life, and for as long as I live, I will use my hands to serve Him.

KRISH PADAYACHEE, 69
STANGER, KZN

My dear

Blessings to you and the Sadhaka friends of yours. Carry on with steady faith the spiritual discipline; do not hurry or expect too quick results; slow maturing makes the fruit sweeter.

Remember you are but an instrument in the hands of the Lord. But, you are not Jada or inert. You have Intelligence, Discrimination, and the power to detach yourself from the world. The more you develop these the better instruments you will be...

If you lift the hand to serve, to help, to console, to encourage another man – you are lifting it for God. Because in every man, there is God. The body is the temple of the individual soul; the world is the temple of the Universal Soul.

With Blessings

Sri Sathya Sai Baba[23]

OM SRI SAI MUKTI PRADAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Grants Liberation

48. WILL YOU REMARRY?

This was the question Swami asked me in a dream, about 4 months after my husband Kriba passed away at the age of 46. My answer was an emphatic, *"No, Swami."* I could not imagine sharing the journey of life with any other partner. It was an extremely vivid early-morning dream, one which I can still recall in graphic detail even though it took place as far back as 1998.

Kriba and I had two sons when we first came to learn of Sai Baba, and it was my older son Nishen who was the first to attend Sai bhajans, eventually pulling the rest of us along with him. Between 1987-1998 our young family was blessed to make nine trips to Prashanthi Nilayam. But it's only with hindsight that I can see how having Swami's darshan almost every year was in preparation for the heartbreaking loss we were eventually going to have to face.

During our second trip in 1989, Swami called the four of us in for an interview, together with the rest of the South Africans. It was during this interview that Swami materialized pendants for both my 7- and 10-year old sons. While placing the hot pendants into their young hands, Swami looked directly at Kriba and I, almost as if to say, **"I will always look after your boys."** At the end of the interview, Swami said, "**I will see you again, five at a time."** The next day, we arranged ourselves into groups of five, and excitedly made our way forward for another interview with Swami, only to be stopped by a sevadal, who advised that Swami would call us when He was ready. Unfortunately, Swami never called us again, and we were forced to return home without the promised interview. At least, that's what we thought… A few months later, I fell pregnant and we were blessed with a baby girl, one who was to become the apple of her father's eye. And one who now made us a family of 'five'.

Four years later, we were at the ashram for Christmas. While I saw to our little girl Jasmitha, Kriba and the boys were involved in the Christmas production, in which my older son Nishen played the role of Krishna. During one of their dress rehearsals, Swami actually came out to watch the children rehearse, and ended up adjusting Nishen's costume before he went on stage! Yes, Swami continued to take care of my boys over the years, and in 1996, my younger son Theveshen was blessed with another interview, this time with the South African youth, where Swami materialized a beautiful green, emerald ring for him.

A year later, Kriba was diagnosed with prostate cancer. It took us by surprise as he had no symptoms. Also, when our family had celebrated Swami's birthday at a friend's home in Pietermaritzburg - a home known for Swami's miracles - in Kriba's slice of birthday cake, we found a 3cm black Shiva Lingam. *(Refer: Image l)* Perhaps we'd somehow believed this blessing provided immunity to life's trials. We were wrong. Because when the cancer was diagnosed, it was already at Stage 4 and required aggressive chemotherapy. In 1998, on Maha Shivarathri, a group of our family and friends joined together in chanting and performing the abhishekam for the lingam at our home. During the night's vigil, we were all blessed with an amazing sight. On the tiny little lingam, the Shiva Namo began to form all on its own. Three white horizontal stripes slowly began to form across the black stone. It was clearly visible to all of us present in the room and remained there for a while before eventually fading away. For the next few months, approximately one teaspoon of amrit began to manifest on that lingam every day.

Taking all these as very positive signs, Kriba, Jasmitha, and I went back to Prashanthi in April. By then, Kriba was quite ill, and going to darshan was very difficult for him, but somehow, we managed. One day, after darshan, he came back to the room very excited. He told us that Swami had materialized something for him - it was not vibuthi, but rather a strange yellowish-grey powder. While he had intended to save some of it for us, Swami had instructed him to eat it immediately. And as Kriba did so, Swami stood in front of him and stroked his

hand before saying, **"Very happy, very happy!"** We returned home filled with happiness because we believed this meant Kriba would be cured. On the contrary, a month later, his condition suddenly deteriorated. We fed him the amrit and we placed Theveshen's emerald ring on his finger. As my husband drew his last breaths, we saw the full Form of Swami appear in the bright green emerald stone. Was that when Swami saw us again, 'five at a time'? I will never know. But it was also the last time we were 'five'. The amrit on the lingam stopped manifesting the moment Kriba left us.

It all happened so quickly. It had only been two years since his cancer diagnosis. And not only did Kriba continue to work throughout his course of treatments, but he also directed a major youth production called 'Sai Mahimas'. I just never expected him to leave us, and I was very upset with Swami. It took me a long time to understand that even though Swami did not cure my husband, He had made him strong enough, and comfortable enough, to fulfil his last two years of worldly karma. Kriba continued to go to work every day. Until the final weekend, when he simply felt too tired. He passed the next Thursday.

I have come to realise that when Swami said He was "very happy," He was actually referring to Kriba's heart and soul, not his body. I know it was the end of my husband's cycles of birth and death. I know this not only because Swami showed Himself in Theveshen's ring at the time of his death, but also because that's what He had said in my dream. **"Your husband is with Me,"** He had said. So, when He then proceeded to ask whether I would remarry, the answer was obvious. Swami appeared to be happy with my response, for He then said, **"Don't worry. I will always take care of you,"** before proceeding to materialize vibuthi and sugar candy for me.

Since then, Swami has been my only goal in life - one in which I too hope to merge one day.

VASSIE PADAYACHEE, 70
MOUNT EDGECOMBE, DURBAN

49. A LIFE CONSECRATED

In memory of Dhiaksha Reddy (1997-2022)

From the moment she was born, she filled our hearts with boundless love and joy. To us, she was the most beautiful, perfect baby in the world. And like all parents, we felt grateful and blessed. But when Dhiaksha was 18 months, our world changed forever... She was diagnosed with renal failure. The doctors did not understand her condition very well and subjected our baby to many surgeries, as well as hemo- and peritoneal dialyses. At one stage, she was the only baby in South Africa on hemodialysis and known to all nephrologists in the country.

I was angry - angry at myself for being so broken and so lost.
*I did not know what I wanted, and I did not know why I was alive. **

Dhiaksha's journey was not an easy one, but as I look back on how things transpired over the years, it is evident that Swami was always there, watching over her, and answering all of her prayers, right from the very beginning. When we were in Durban and Dhiaksha was still a baby on dialysis, we were approached by a father of another 12-year-old girl on dialysis. Not only did this complete stranger refer us to the medical team at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town, but he also picked us up at the airport and supported us throughout our stay. We were so overwhelmed, and without the amazing support of this gentleman and the doctors and nurses in Cape Town, we would not have coped. We were permitted to stay at the Nurses Quarters, while Dhiaksha's

doctors did everything they could to kickstart her little kidneys, sometimes attending to her at all hours of the night.

When we returned home after a four month stay in Cape Town, I remember thinking how nice it would be if we could have bhajans for Dhiaksha's 5th birthday. Then, as if reading my thoughts, a Sai devotee friend walked in and said, *"Let's do bhajans to celebrate Dhiaksha's special day!"* It was these little leelas which helped make our ordeal more bearable.

Six months after starting dialysis, we went back to Cape town for a check-up. After our morning prayers, I asked Dhiaksha what she had asked Swami for. She replied that she had asked Him to take out the pipes. Later, as we walked into the renal unit, her doctor said, *"Guess what's happening today, Dhiaksha. Your pipes are coming out!"* On another occasion, I again asked her what she had prayed for. This time, she said she had prayed to see her kindergarten teacher, a much-loved woman who taught the little children at the hospital. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived, it was after hours and the teacher had long gone home. So, after our consult we visited a park in Sea Point. While Dhiaksha was on the swings, we spotted her teacher walking past! Dhiaksha couldn't stop beaming knowing that her prayer had been answered.

These are just some of the ways in which Swami answered her prayers, proving to us that Dhiaksha was His child and always under His protection. I think it's natural for us to look for the big miracles. But it was the little things that showed her that Swami was always with her. In 2003, at the age of 6, she came off dialysis. Her doctor's response to this unlikely outcome was: *"I don't know which God you pray to, but keep praying, because Dhiaksha is a miracle."* By Swami's Grace, Dhiaksha went into total remission, and was weaned off all medication.

I was happy.
I was blossoming.
The name of Sai saved my very soul from falling into darkness

Unfortunately, 9 years later, at the age of 15, Dhiaksha contracted Chicken Pox which impacted her kidneys severely. She had to be hospitalized, and a central line inserted. When she awoke from the surgery, she asked: *"Am I dead?" "No,"* we replied before asking, *"Why?" "Because I saw Swami standing next to my bed,"* she answered. Dhiaksha had to be put back on peritoneal dialysis which meant being hooked up to the machine every night for 10 hours and then getting up for school the next morning. Through her young adult years, she was subjected to many ordeals. Not only did she have to deal with the physical pain caused by her deteriorating kidneys, but she was also subjected to emotional pain caused by children at school who would belittle her, and family members who retreated when we searched for a possible donor match for a kidney transplant.

Will it end?
I wonder, and I wonder
But I can never be sure.

However, with Swami's Grace, she passed matric. And on two occasions, through the kindness and generosity of Sai devotees, He sent His robe to bring healing to His child. But with hindsight, we can see that she was never meant to have that transplant. At 18, Dhiaksha was already suffering end stage renal failure, and requiring blood transfusions. My husband's chronic conditions prevented him from being a kidney donor. And while I wanted so desperately to give my daughter my kidney, her transfusions would impact our match - sometimes we were a match, and sometimes not. Then, when I was finally a match again, COVID-19 hit the world, and all transplants in SA came to a grinding halt. While we will never know for sure, it almost feels like "Dhiaksha" needed to live out her life being true to her name's meaning, which is "sacred" or "consecrated". Maybe our daughter wasn't meant to have a transplant because she needed to remain pure… for this final lifetime.

Yes, every mother believes their child is amazing. But Dhiaksha took amazing to the next level. As a baby, the only chant she could say was *"Om Shri Sai Ram"* and she would say it all the time. At 10, she was blessed with visiting Prashanthi and having Swami's darshan. Her favourite book was the Tapovanam and she would read it at least 2-3 times a year, especially before her birthday. She also loved vibuthi, which never lasted long in our house! She was a Balvikas student who believed in speaking her truth, which she often did by writing poetry and letters to Swami which she left at our lamp. She also completed the EHV Teacher Training Course and went on to teach Balvikas at the Sandton Sai Centre for 3 years. She was loved by all the children in her Sai Blossom group, especially for her arts and craft activities and for introducing them to the Surya Namaskar. In fact, Dhiaksha once said to me: *"Swami wouldn't give me this life if He didn't think I could live it!"*

So, I live my days, just one at a time.
I treasure everyone who has been sent by Sai, in my life.

She taught us how to love and serve unconditionally…
Even though her days were not easy, she would still cook and bake and write little notes for us. She was the first to say 'I love you' and to give anyone a hug. When I would go to massage her during the night, she would first make sure that I was covered with a blanket and was comfortable before I could start massaging her. When I had to take my husband Praga to hospital during COVID and had to sit outside the hospital waiting, she kept messaging to check if I was ok, and she made sure she prepared something for me to eat when I got home. She did all of this despite being in pain and having COVID herself!

She taught us what it means to be strong and to have unshakeable faith…
She would go to sleep every night listening to Swami's Voice. But her favourite God-form was Lord Shiva, and she had pictures of Him all over her room. Two days before the end, she told us that she had seen Lord Shiva come out of the picture. And then on her last night, she first told me to sing bhajans and then to play the Tryambakam mantra. That is how our daughter Dhiaksha passed from this world, at the age of 24.

Being in this state of mind can take its toll on you.
It lasted for most of my life - but I found a blossoming light.
It sang the melody called "Sai" and echoed a sound known as "Om"

She was truly Swami's ambassador.

I know that Dhiaksha lived a lot longer than the medical experts expected only through the Grace of our Swami.

One day, my heart will feel less broken.
But for now, I humbly accept and acknowledge that Swami consecrated my life
By sending me a child so sacred.

**Extracts from 'Blossoming' - a poem by Dhiaksha Reddy*

COOKIE REDDY, 55
NORTH RIDING, JOHANNESBURG

Mukthi is not a gift.
It is an achievement earned through our effort and His Grace.
When Mukthi is won, man's long pilgrimage ends.
He has reached the goal.[24]

OM SRI SAI KALUSHA VIDHURAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Remover of Defects

50. LIFE IS A MARATHON

It was 01:00am on 11 June 2001. I woke up from my stupor, bleary-eyed, nauseous, and with a pounding head. After yet another night of binge drinking, I was sick as a dog. But this night felt different. This night, I wanted to change...

I grew up in Havenside, Chatsworth, in a loving household which included two siblings, dedicated parents, and cherished grandparents. There was always hot food on the stove, and neighbours making themselves at home. My mother, a nurse, cared for everyone in the neighbourhood. My father, an educator, taught us to be tough and streetwise. At the age of 10, I was introduced to Sai Baba by my mother's friend – a doctor from India, who gave me a little statue of Shirdi Sai Baba and a picture of Sathya Sai Baba, and who told me to fast on Thursdays. I was a fortunate child, with a good upbringing, which included having to wash the dishes after dinner.

But, as I grew up, I became drawn to typical teenage distractions, and my contact with Sai began to diminish. Within our home, we showed our parents great respect, but outside, my brother and I were scoundrels. (I was possibly worse because I knew my big brother had my back!) By the time I was in matric, I was prioritising parties and spirits of a different kind. As for college, let's just say that was a three-year vacation! I was eventually kicked out of hostel due to my bad behaviour. It was my mother, a woman who hated alcohol due to a family history of abuse, who had to plead with the governing bodies to have me reinstated just so that I could complete my qualification. Ironically, throughout this time, I still fasted on Thursdays (but mostly because the parties were limited to the weekend than by any genuine spiritual intent!)

Much like the family I grew up in, I was blessed in 1986, with a wonderful wife, and later the beginnings of my own family. My career also took off with promise. From Middleburg to Phoenix, I loved teaching. I loved the staff with whom I worked, and the communities we were situated in, many of which were home to the most drug-impacted families, and the poorest of the poor. It was not unusual to find me in school on a Saturday morning, involved in some or other extra class or project. But I had one big problem...

Alcohol.

It proved to be my biggest downfall. No matter how many Saturdays I would put in, it could never replace my 'days off'. I could have been a principal much earlier on in my career, had it not been for my inability to control my alcohol intake. It compromised any prospect of promotion or career advancement. Because everyone knew that I was a binge drinker. On the weekends, I could never just stop at one beer. I had to drink it all. And worse still, I would fool myself into thinking that I had it under control. To the point that I would even accompany my friend to his AA meetings, learn from him the 12 principles and steps to recovery, but then wait for him outside the meeting - smoking!

But the 11th of June 2001 was my turning point. On that fateful night, something felt very different. I found myself stumbling to an A4 picture of Sai Baba hanging in our home. Looking straight into His eyes, I prayed: *"I can't carry on being like this. Please help me."*

I have never touched alcohol again.

I started going to the AA meetings (this time, actually going inside), and three months later, a friend invited me to the Durban North Sai Centre, after which I would take Swami home with me every week. Literally. You see, it became my responsibility to transport the large frame of Sai Baba to and from satsang (if ever there was

an attendance guarantee, that was it!) I believe that everyone needs to make conscious contact with the God of one's understanding. As soon as I reconnected with Swami, everything changed. For the better.

In 2004, I was promoted to Deputy Principal, and my work both within the schools and within the communities, took on new meaning. I was promoted to Principal in 2019, and through this privileged leadership role, helped to build Hopeville Primary School in Phoenix, to be amongst the best in Durban. I could only do this because Swami was my Silent Guide, even when I didn't recognise it. When there were lines of parents waiting to see me, I made sure I met with each and every one of them, because Swami taught me about Love and Respect.

I am committed to serving, because I am grateful for the life I was blessed with. I believe that gratitude, while a language of the heart, is best expressed through action. As such, I knew that I did not need to apologise to my mother for the pain and trouble I caused her in my younger years. I just needed to stop drinking.

Even though I had left Swami, Swami had never left me. (If He had, and given my antics, I would likely not have survived to tell this tale!) But on 11 June 2001, I finally did right - I brought Swami back into my life, and since then, I have never let Him go. Not even when, within the space of a mere 7 months, my mother passed at the age of 92, our dog Zeus died, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and our special daughter lost her battle with pneumonia at the age of 33. No, not even those 7 dark and very painful months, could lure me back to the bottle. Every morning and evening, I would pray to Swami to help me take care of the challenges I needed to face. And He did. He helped take care of it all – even the ones I was not aware of. Like protecting me from two assailants, or a speeding vehicle, as I was chanting my Gayathri mantra, on my early morning runs.

Over the years, I have run 14 Comrades Marathons. Through it, I have learnt that there is no hill that is insurmountable. And that life is a marathon, with our progress dependent on a single step forward. And ultimately, on the many single steps forward. I don't believe we can be spiritually perfect in this life. We simply have to focus on turning our negatives into positives, and keep moving forward.

I have never seen the Physical Form of our Bhagawan Baba. Our family circumstances prevented us from travelling to Prashanthi Nilayam. When I did eventually go, in 2016, I was overcome with emotion, crying uncontrollably in the Sai Kulwant Hall. Perhaps the tears spent were from remorse for all the detours and dead-ends I had taken; perhaps it was from gratitude for being pulled back onto the right road; or perhaps I had simply got a glimpse of where the marathon finally ends.

AVINESH PILLAY, 61
REDHILL, DURBAN

51. SLOW AND STEADY CLEANSING

I wasn't a gambler or a drinker. But I loved meat, I smoked like a chimney, and I swore like a sailor! In 2005, my life began to turn, but it took a long time for me to get there.

In 1993, I enquired from a work colleague if he was having a 'porridge jorl' over the weekend, referring to the smoking, drinking and meat-dishes that are sometimes on offer after some Hindu prayer rituals. He replied by asking me a strange question: *"If you had common sense, would you need traffic lights?"* *"Not really,"* I answered. *"Exactly,"* he explained. *"If you pray every day, do you need to have these big prayer ceremonies? Those are the traffic lights for people who don't pray. They are simply a call to Stop and Pray!"* As my colleague obviously

sounded very learned, I accepted his invitation to his home where I was greeted with a life-sized picture of Sai Baba. *"Oh! This dude with the curly hair again,"* I thought to myself. My colleague played a VHS of Sai Baba giving darshan for 20 minutes and I was so bored! Sai Baba was just not for me. Besides, I wanted to go to Hyperama, to do some shopping.

The two of us were strolling leisurely into the giant supermarket in Prospecton when a massive gilder came crashing down onto the tills, injuring many people. My colleague then turned to me and said: *"I know you were irritated with me. But that 20 minutes we spent at home watching Sai Baba's darshan, saved us from this accident."* But I was not convinced. *"Maybe, maybe not."* I thought. However, the one thing that this colleague did manage to achieve, but only many years later in 2002, was to convince me to abstain from meat for 40 days before Ganesha Chathurthi, a practice I refer to as the 'Ganesha Fast' in honour of the Remover of all Obstacles.

Three years later, on 17 February 2005, which was my birthday, I decided to give up smoking. As it was a habit of 21 years, I knew I would need some help, so I saw an acupuncturist who inserted some needles in my ears. For the first 7 days, I had no problems at all, but as soon as I had the needles removed, the unbearable cravings returned. All I could do was to keep saying: *"Sai Ram! Sai Ram! Sai Ram!"* That repetitive chant became so comforting to me that it actually made me forget about my craving. Soon it became 14 days without smoking, then 21 days…, then 20 years!

Later that same year, when it was time for my usual Ganesha fast, I continued to abstain from meat but through to the month of Purtassi, for a total period of 2,5 months. But then I decided to fast even longer, and see if I could manage it. It's now been 20 years, and I am still managing! I think the seed of vegetarianism was actually planted in me in 1985 by a 'strange beggar' I encountered, who refused a plate of mutton curry when offered to him. With disgust, this beggar proclaimed before leaving: *"Your freezer is your mortuary, and your stomach is your graveyard."* Even though it took place some 40 years ago, I have never forgotten that incident, nor those words.

Having accomplished giving up smoking and meat, I felt that the next thing that needed to go was the vulgarity in my language. Unfortunately, I work in a manufacturing environment where every second word is a swear word, so out of all my vices, this was the one most resistant to change. It took almost 3 years, but I eventually succeeded by using a count system. In year 1, I recorded over 2000 swear words; in year 2, I was down to 200; and in year 3, I was down to 5. The act of counting brings awareness. Eventually, before you can swear, the count begins to go off in your head, and prevents the swear word from even emerging.

In 2010, five years after making the decision to change my lifestyle, I became heavily involved in South Africa's Ubuntu production. Everyone who participated in the production was required to wear a lanyard, at the end of which hung a plastic sleeve into which an official badge was inserted. On the 3rd day of the pilgrimage, my wife's badge was full of vibuthi, but mine remained empty. One day, as if in consolation, my team and I were working in the art room, when we heard something fall. We turned to find a sweet on the floor. Suddenly, we saw another sweet appear in mid-air, before also falling to the floor. Then there was another. Three magical sweets fell that day. As there were 6 of us working, we shared the sweets between us, in the spirit of Ubuntu, by cutting them in half.

Over the years, Swami has blessed me in innumerable ways on innumerable occasions - from obtaining desired jobs through impossible means, to undergoing major surgery with virtually no pain; from delightful dreams of Him dressed in jeans and dancing to favourite songs, to inexplicable leelas of disappearing lamp water and downward wafting incense smoke. But I list 2005 as my turning point, because it began the process of my slow and steady cleansing.

I am really grateful to Swami for helping me to remove my faults, and for making my transformation a reality. I don't know how I could have done it without Him. Whatever I am today is through Swami's Will alone. Every day, He continues to help remove my imperfections, as only the Kalusha Vidhuraya can do.

MANO NAIR, 55
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN

52. FOUR DREAMS, ONE GOAL

I have been connected to Swami, at least in this lifetime, since the age of 6. I attended satsang in honour of Shirdi Sai Baba every Monday with all my cousins, brothers and sister. Even though I enjoyed the bhajans, my primary reason for attending was for the prasad that was offered after the prayer! My early life was a bittersweet one. My dad and mum were parents to ten children, four of their own and six of my widowed uncle's children. When my lovely aunt died of cancer, my parents unselfishly stepped into the vacuum created by her tragic passing. They taught us good morals and values right from an early age and, even in adulthood, I have tried to follow their example in kindness. Unfortunately however, over the years, my father and my uncle would get into many arguments, usually while under the influence of alcohol. Both men had very little money and the hardship and responsibilities they both had to shoulder took its toll, and inevitably led to excessive alcohol use. Drinking was their way out.

To escape the mayhem at home, I spent lots of time away from it, hanging out with my friends, who brought with them their own bad habits. Unknowingly, I began to accept these habits as the norm and made them a part of my own life. After finishing school, I did not pursue any further studies because I was not the studious type and because our limited resources had to be used to raise and educate the rest of the children. So instead, I spent my time helping my wonderful grandmother with her own fruit and vegetable stall, which she used to make additional income to augment our household finances. My grandmother worked up until her 70's when she became too frail to attend to the stall.

It was then that I decided to leave the security of my home and family in Durban and pursue my destiny. With the little money that I had saved, I headed to Johannesburg in 1989. At first, it was a sad and lonely experience for me, until I met my beautiful wife. Our chance meeting at an unplanned social event was definitely orchestrated by a Higher Power because, from the moment I met her, I knew that she was the one. We courted for a short while before getting married, and only then did I notice that she kept a photo of an orange-robed person sporting an afro on the cupboard next to our bed. Yes, my wife had been a Sai devotee from a very young age, and I thank Swami for using her as His instrument to draw me to Him. At the time however, I never asked her about her photo, nor was I asking any of life's fundamental questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? I was simply young and carefree, living for today, and enjoying life to the full.

Unfortunately, this meant that alcohol was also a big part of my life. I was young and I could not understand its harmful impacts on a marriage and on children. I simply used it as an escape, one which was convenient because I was also joining the wrong people and travelling a lot. My work took me to all parts of Africa where I spent long periods of time away from home, with little else by way of leisure and entertainment. Soon I became a functioning alcoholic. I began by drinking only on the weekends, but then the drinking crept into Mondays, and shortly thereafter, I was drinking every day. My wife kept urging me to stop and to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, but I did not listen to her. After all, in my own mind, I was still managing to hold down my job and I was fulfilling all my duties as a father and husband. But that's not all: our family also attended satsang

regularly; we participated in many seva projects; we cooked and fed the less fortunate; we helped in every way we could. Slowly but surely, Sai Baba was becoming my conscience and my guide. And when that happens, all the other parts of your life that don't fit in with His Mission, begin to feel very uncomfortable. I began to experience my life as a record that was just being played over and over again. I also began to ask life's fundamental questions, but my answers came up empty. Life simply had no meaning to me - I went to work, I came home, I ate, I drank, I slept, and I woke up, and did it again. It was tiring and there was just no end to the repetition. I would get up in the morning, look in the mirror, and think to myself, "I just did this." The déjà vu was hard to shake off.

Then, during the years 2006-2008, we made three trips to Prashanthi Nilayam during which we absorbed Swami's beautiful darshan. On one of those occasions, Swami stood no more than 10m away from me and I felt like time had stood still. I was so overwhelmed by His Energy that the tears just flowed down my face. In that moment, I felt like I was in another world, one in which only Swami and I existed. As a result, I began to increasingly yearn for Swami, especially for Him to come into my dreams. Then, roughly over that same period, I had a series of four dreams that would turn my life around.

The first dream was of Swami giving darshan at the ashram. I tried desperately to get His attention, but He would not even glance at me, even though He was standing right next to me. I felt sad and alone and my heart cried out for His padanamaskar. As I looked at Swami walking away, He began to transform into a Jesus-looking person, wearing colourful clothes and dancing around. Then, He suddenly appeared in front of me and gave me a slap on my back as I bowed down to touch His Feet. When I awoke, I could still feel the sensation on my back; it was the most wonderful slap ever!

The second dream was set in a private interview with Swami and my family. Swami asked me for betel nut and betel leaf. I ran everywhere in search of the requested items and only managed to find betel leaves. I returned hesitantly to Swami knowing that I only had one of the two items He had asked for. But to my relief, Swami did not mind. When I awoke, I learned that Swami used to chew paan in His younger days but then He had stopped. I also learned that betel nuts are classified as a stimulant drug much like tobacco and caffeine. The fact that in my dream I was not able to find any of the addictive substance was a clear message for me to stay away from it, just like Swami had!

If I had any doubts about the significance of my dreams, the third dream quickly dispelled them. I dreamt of a young paraplegic boy known to our family. Prior to the car accident which had paralysed him, this young lad had visited Prashanthi with his parents and had been blessed with Swami's padanamaskar. Despite the trauma they suffered, this family never lost faith in Swami. In my dream, I was simply pushing the young boy in his wheelchair and Swami came up to him and blessed him. The next morning, when I woke up, I received the news that the young boy had sadly passed from this world! This dream indicated two important things to me: that my young friend was now with Swami; and that my dreams were indeed very real, and filled with important lessons.

But it was the fourth and final dream that would change my life. Even while receiving so many blessings from Swami, I was still indulging in alcohol. Not only was I drinking every day, but I did not know how to get out of the rut I was in. In the fateful dream, Swami appeared, but spoke no words. Instead, He made use of hand gestures that would speak volumes. First, His thumb moved towards His mouth - indicative of the drinking. Then He raised His palm toward me and moved it side to side - indicative of No! When I awoke, I immediately resolved to stop drinking alcohol. But I did not tell anyone. I simply started attending AA meetings every day in an effort to keep my mind away from the alcohol. It was only after a few weeks that I told my family of the dream and of my involvement with AA. It has now been 14 years and my life has changed completely.

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has been my Guru, my mother, my father and my friend across many lifetimes. I cannot thank Him enough for taking me into His fold and for never giving up on me. Through His Grace, my family has survived all the hills and valleys that can be expected of worldly relationships. But our relationship with the Divine is the only constant we have. It is our only goal, and one to be cherished for all eternity.

JAY SUBRAMONEY, 57
JOHANNESBURG

53. MY FATHER

It's been said that before birth, the soul chooses its parents carefully. If that is true, then I must admit to having spent a large part of my life wondering why I had selected my father…

My childhood was punctuated by frequent outbursts of anger and violence, brought on by alcohol, a substance over which my father had no control. On the one hand, I grew up with more than enough - food, clothing, education - but on the other hand, during those drunken bouts, I would be reminded of the burden that I was. While I learnt very quickly not to take anything my dad said personally, I could never ignore his abuse of my mother. And as I grew, from a young boy into a young man, my fear morphed into anger, and eventually my anger would become retaliation.

As far as I can recall, there was always a picture of Sai Baba at our shrine. It took on special meaning whenever my grandmother, whom we called 'Tongaat Aya,' visited. We would listen with great curiosity while she spoke of His 'power'. But beyond Tongaat Aya's occasional stories, Sai Baba was nothing more than a mysteriously powerful man whose picture stood amongst the many deities to whom we children were forced to fold our hands and prostrate to. This coercion would then become a ritual to be followed during the annual visit to the temple or to family 'porridge prayers.' Eventually, the ritual would evolve into a habit, a bargain chip we could use when we needed to pass our exams, or when we wanted a special birthday gift, or when we needed protection from doctors, insects and bullies. However, after years of not being heard, my habit of praying for protection from 'bullies' slowly began to diminish until it was forgotten altogether. Until, one autumn, when my relationship with God would change forever…

The year was 1993 - my only sister had just given birth to a baby, and my mum went to Johannesburg to help her. I returned home from university only to hear my father arguing furiously with my mother on the phone. The argument escalated quickly, and with each repeat phone call, there was more drinking. I tried to intervene, but it only served to incense my father further and to make my mother more anxious on the other end of the line. With no immediate threat of harm to my mother, I gave up at being peacemaker, and decided to go to bed. But something within prompted me to first go to our lamp. There, in front of Sai Baba's picture, I cried. And I shouted at Him. I threatened to never worship Him again, unless He put an end to my father's horrible ways. When there was nothing left to say, I fell asleep.

A few hours later, I woke to the sounds of my father pouring all his drinks down the drain.

For a man who would normally never waste a drop, this was very unusual behaviour. But I was cynical. Years of anger and resentment made me see this as nothing more than an insincere 'demonstration' of sorts. How wrong I was! For I would soon discover that Swami had indeed put an end to my dad's drinking.

He did it instantly.
He did it in response to the ultimatum of a desperate young man.
And He did it to protect our family from the winter that lay ahead.
A winter that would bring a storm so brutal, we would risk falling apart completely.

A few weeks after my father threw away his alcohol, my sister was brutally murdered.
She was 24 years old. With a 6-week old baby.

The months turned into years. Years of dealing with police investigators and witnesses; years that drained every saving on legal fees trying to bring an elusive perpetrator to justice; and years of being denied access to my parents' only grandchild. This was a never-ending winter that would ordinarily drive most people to some sort of 'warming' substance. But not my father. He turned to the only Refuge there is - Swami. He attended satsang religiously and participated in all the seva projects. The once violently angry man became increasingly soft and passive.

I, on the other hand, was filled with rage. My sister's murderer was still at large. It was a raw deal. And I was sick of raw deals. This new rage, coupled with old resentment, prevented me from supporting my father through his pain, and from investing in our relationship.

It would only be many years later, after time had washed away the acute grief, after satsang had performed its psychic surgery, and after seva had brought new perspectives, that I would have my epiphany. You see, I had always envied those that had incredible experiences with Swami, either in His Physical Form or through His manifestations or materialisations. Seeing that I hadn't had any, I felt like I wasn't loved by Swami or worthy of Him. But one day, it finally dawned on me…

… that Swami had taken time off from running the universe to respond to my wellbeing, even though I was angry with Him. He had silently orchestrated everything for our protection. Swami had over-delivered, even when I under-prayed.

I finally felt worthy,
For Swami's Love had manifested in my life
Through my father's transformation.

Hindsight has both humbled and elevated me greatly. My father died of a heart attack at the age of 65. Even though he never got to see his grandson, or justice for his daughter, he died as a man transformed, without any residual anger in his heart. Such a miraculous transformation is only possible through Divine Grace showered by the Father of all fathers.

As for me, I wish I had forgiven my dad and acknowledged his efforts while he was still alive. But at least I now know why I chose him for this lifetime.

Through my father's darkness, I turned to Swami
Through my father's light, I rested in Swami
But it was in my father's journey from dark to light, that I found my Self.

RAYVEN, 54
SOMERSET PARK, DURBAN

My dear children

Life is so complicated. I can see that all of you are going through various stages. The awakenings are there.

I am your Guru, Father and Protector. I love you and I'll guide you.

Life is like the slopes of a mountain. You always climb up, but sometimes you may fall. But always remember that you've got the power to stand up on your feet again... [25]

There is no such thing as failure in the universe. A hundred times a man will hurt himself, a thousand times he will tumble, but in the end he will realise that he is God...

With Love

Baba[26]

OM SRI SAI KARUNAKARAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is Compassionate

54. EDAVAKU (DON'T CRY)

In the early 70s my dad wasn't well and had to be hospitalised. As a result, a friend at work gifted me with a picture of Shirdi Baba. I took the picture home and passed it over to my mother. She grumbled and asked me why I was giving her an old man's photo. "*We don't believe in this Sai Baba,*" she said. "*We only pray to Rama and Krishna and our ancestors.*" Then she threw the photo aside.

That night my mum had a nightmare in which a pack of angry dogs were barking at her and trying to force her into a grave. She prayed to Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and all our ancestors to help - but none of them came through. She then thought of the picture of Shirdi Sai Baba by her bedside and said, *"Aum Sai Ram"*. My mum was immediately relieved of this nightmare. When she woke up, she took the picture of Shirdi Sai Baba and stuck it behind her bedroom door.

In 1973, my mother, Nanny Chelliah, started to hold Sai services at our house in Puntans Hill. As the house became too small for the crowds, we had to move into our garage, and have the bhajans on a Wednesday so that devotees could go to a formal centre on a Thursday. Hundreds of devotees attended bhajans at our home.

In 1975, my mother went to Prashanthi. She was standing with a whole lot of letters in her hand when Swami wrapped his arm around her shoulder and said: **"You are worried about all these people. They will outlive you."** He then summoned her to the interview room on 5 OCTOBER 1975, and materialised a gold chain and pendant with His picture, which He put around her neck. He also said: **"Two years from today, you will lose your kumkum and manja."** I know these facts because my mother relayed the details of her trip to us when she returned home, especially about her interview with Baba.

My mother was a business woman who made her living selling fruit and vegetables door-to-door. On 5 October 1977 she called me at 13h00 at work and told me to take the next day off as she was busy with buying vegetables for a Ram Bhajan. That same day she took my brother to the doctor as he had shingles. An hour later, my brother called and told me to rush to the doctor's rooms as our mum was suffering from a severe headache and needed to be hospitalised. When I got there, I saw my mother remove her materialised pendant and put it around my brother's neck. I said to her: *"Ma, you have only one daughter. Give it to me."* She said, *"You won't need it. Your brother will."* As we rushed her in the ambulance, she held my hands and said, *"Shirl, you will have to take care of your father and Morgan and Daya* (my two brothers). *And complete building our house."* I didn't think that my mother was leaving us, but she died holding my hands - on 5 OCTOBER 1977 – exactly two years to the date that Swami told her she would 'lose her kumkum and manja'.

I was devasted. I blamed Swami for killing my mother. I was in my early 20s and hadn't taken much interest to get to know more about this Sai Baba. And now, I certainly didn't want to pray to him anymore.

In1981, I found myself in Prashanthi Nilayam as part of a temple tour group of India. Arriving late at night, the place felt like a jail. I had to sleep on the floor in a dormitory, with no hot water, lots of mosquitoes, and strange toilets. I was horrified. Then I saw Sai Baba who appeared to me as if He was trotting around like a movie star. In my mind, I cursed Him for causing the death of my beloved mother.

On 5 OCTOBER 1981, this Baba began sprinkling water with a broom on the heads of all the people sitting around Him. I closed my eyes and hoped this 'dude' wouldn't come anywhere near me. The next moment however, I felt water from the kulsam being splashed on my face. I was so scared to open my eyes and started crying out of fear.

But Swami spoke to me so lovingly in Telugu: **"Edavaku (don't cry)."** He then said to me that even though I had stopped praying at our house on a Wednesday, He is always with me. And then, with an indescribable Love in His Voice, He said: **"When you go into the garden you don't pick bad fruit or flowers. Just like that, I only pick the best."**

On the 4th year anniversary of my mum's death, Swami became my Everything.

SHIRLEY NAIDOO, 73
PUNTANS HILL, DURBAN

55. A SWAYING GARLAND FOR A BROKEN HEART

In 2006, my husband Morgan passed away at the age of 59.

Five months later, my only son Anashan was killed in a car crash on the Higginson Highway in Chatsworth. He was only 26 years old.

After their deaths, I did not pray to Swami for more than a year. I was so angry with Him.

But He never let me go.
And slowly… I got stronger.

While you can never fully heal from the death of your loved ones, especially the death of your child, I started to regain my strength, little by little.

6 years later, at the end of 2012, I accompanied my sister-in-law to Prashanthi Nilayam. Every day we would go and prostrate at the foot of Swami's Sannidhi in the Sai Kulwant Hall. The 24th November, the day after Swami's birthday, is my daughter Yogini's birthday. Amidst all the crowds, I sat and listened to a Carnatic music recital filled with bittersweet emotions. 'Sweet' because I felt grateful for my treasured daughter back home in South Africa. But 'bitter' because Carnatic music was Anashan's favourite. These feelings only intensified and by the morning of 3rd December, I was particularly emotional. It was Anashan's birthday, and I could not stop thinking about my lost son.

That afternoon, I lined up as usual with all the other ladies in order to do our padanamaskars at the feet of the Sai Sannidhi. It was then that I noticed something unusual. I was the third lady in the third line!

Suddenly, a sevadal, whom I did not know at all, walked straight up to me, and singled me out of the line of ladies. She said: *"Come! Come! Swami wants you to touch His Sannidhi on the side."* I did not know why but I just followed her and duly performed my prostration at the unusual spot. In my heart, was just a sadness and longing for my son.

When I looked up, the sevadal said: *"Look! Look how Swami is shaking the garland for you."* And sure enough, there was no wind, and there were many garlands around the Sannidhi. But the colourful garland right by the spot where I had bowed down was swaying vigorously. As if to say: *"I know your heart. I am with you."*

Anashan loved music and studied in India for 5 years to eventually become a professional tabla player. Together with his music teachers, he had visited Swami, and I was told that they had sat on the dais with Swami and that Swami had materialized vibuthi for them.

Perhaps the side to which the sevadal beckoned me was also the area upon which my son had sat – I guess I will never know.

What I do know is that life can be very difficult. But every day I still get up and try to make the most of it. I do yoga and I even play bowls!

And I know that Swami is always there for me.

SAROJ NAIDOO, 71
DURBAN CENTRAL

56. FROM CEMENT FLOORS TO CLOUD NINE

My first pilgrimage to Prashanthi Nilayam was in December 1981. I travelled with my husband Jai, as well as my brother and sister. Not only was I four months pregnant, but I had also left our four-year old son back home in SA, in the care of our extended family, with whom we shared a very comfortable life. Even though I had been primed about the ashram conditions, nothing could have prepared me for what lay ahead…

To describe Puttaparthi in the 80's as dusty and primitive may sound harsh, but harsh is exactly how it was. We set out early from Bangalore, travelling on gravel roads, and arriving only late at night. Even though the accommodation office was closed, our four weary bodies which had just taken a beating from the untarred roads, were warmly welcomed by a senior sevadal who escorted us to Block 7. To my dismay however, the room allocated to us was already full! There, on a bare cement floor, lay a line of ladies already fast asleep. With no restaurants to serve us, we nibbled on a few snacks that we had carried and tried to get comfortable in the strange, dark environment. My sister and I squeezed ourselves amidst the ladies on the cement floor, with only our shawls to cover us, while Jai and my brother had to make do on the open verandah.

Needless to say, I could not sleep. At 2:30 in the morning, I woke to take an ice-cold shower in the very basic room. This was followed by sitting in a long queue for the morning proceedings which included Omkar, Suprabhatam and meditation. Fortunately, our group was blessed to be taken into the mandir, but even as I sat there in the holy sanctum, I still felt very lost and uncomfortable and, not to mention, hungry. At 4:00am promptly, the chanting of the Omkar commenced. As I recited in unison with the rest of the congregants, my eyes were firmly closed. However, I soon felt a prompting to open my eyes, only to behold the beloved Form of our Bhagawan Baba who had physically taken His seat on the mandir chair.

Though I was delighted to see and feel His Divine Presence, my mind was still very agitated. All I could focus on was the fact that: we did not have our own room; it was terribly uncomfortable and cramped; there was no way I would be able to get any sleep; the heat was unbearable; the shower was icy; I was starving, etc etc. I really began to doubt how we were going to complete our planned two-week stay at the ashram. But as opposed to suppressing these thoughts, I communicated them silently to Swami. And I know He listened, as He sat there gracefully on His chair.

Later that morning, I encountered the long breakfast queue at the only available canteen. While the hot coffee was undoubtedly welcome, the highly spiced idli and sambhar, did not go down well. Mint Imperials became my food of choice, and I would pop them into my mouth whenever I had a chance, while praying furiously to Baba to please help me. I really did not want to remain in the ashram under such difficult conditions, and I complained to my sister that we needed to go stay someplace else. But then, Swami kicked into gear, and fulfilled the pleas of this desperate, pregnant woman, in a manner that I could never have foreseen…

Later that same morning, a sevadal ran up to us to advise that we were being allocated our own room. And during the afternoon darshan session, we were blessed with the front row. Swami walked gracefully by in His orange robe and then stood right in front of me, waiting. I knew immediately that He was trying to pacify me, by granting me the good fortune of padanamaskar, which I accepted gratefully. Thereafter, as Baba walked away, I collected the sand upon which He had stood, for it was now sacred (Forty-four years later, I still have that sand, neatly tucked in a handkerchief). But my blessings didn't end there, for shortly after bhajans, Baba granted what most pilgrims to the ashram long for - the prized interview.

I sat on the extreme right of the interview room, just absorbing Swami's darshan as He spoke to the South African devotees. A young woman who was still waiting for her fiancé to join her at the ashram asked Swami if he really was coming, to which Swami replied, **"He's on his way."** But the woman pushed further, *"Swami, will he really marry me?"* With a reassuring laugh, Swami said, **"Yes! Yes! You will get married."** (they did indeed!) During this same interview, Swami also spoke to Jai about his work and health situation.

Swami then got up from His chair and walked amongst us. When He stood in front of me, I took padanamaskar for the second time in one day. Then, with a wave of His Hand, He poured vibuthi directly into my up-turned palm. He then flicked His Thumb nonchalantly, and moved on to the next person, leaving me crying in disbelief. Consumed as I was with emotion, some of the other ladies began to help themselves to a pinch of the vibuthi, until one kind lady told me to close my palm, to ensure there was still some left for me and my family.

Needless to say, after that interview, every intention that I had harboured of leaving the ashram, vanished. I was now on cloud nine, my agitation having completely dissipated. Nothing in the world mattered any more, not even whether or not we had food to eat. Baba had satisfied a far deeper need of mine, one that made all physical needs completely insignificant. Our two-week stay in Prashanthi Nilayam was filled with the most incredible Divine Energy, including the blessing of six padanamaskars (in those days, Swami would even walk amidst the second and third rows of people, which greatly increased our opportunity to touch His Feet).

I returned home to South Africa with a heart brimming with love for our Baba. The compassion and care which He showed this whining woman, is something I will forever be grateful for. I continue to ask Swami for things all the time, even if it's for trivial items like lost parking tickets. If you don't call out and ask Him, you won't get! Never doubt, our Compassionate Lord is always listening, and He will always provide.

I am truly grateful to our benevolent Bhagawan Baba for showering me with immense guidance and love , especially during the ongoing Sai seva activities in my daily life.

AMARJOTHI (BIMLA) SINGH, 70
UMHLANGA, DURBAN

"I shall bear all your burdens. When you have boarded the train, why carry the box on your head? Leave everything to me!" [27]

Dear child,

Life is an interlude between what was and what will be. This interlude should be used not to lament over what cannot be helped or set right, but to seek God, see Him and take refuge in Him.

I am writing this letter to you in order to shower on you a cool rain of Love.

Baba[28]

OM SRI SAI SARVA HRDVASINE NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Indweller of all Hearts

57. THE HEART OF HANUMAN

22/2/93 - Morning went for darshan. I was very lucky to hand over the letter to Sathya Sai Baba personally. Actually I tried for 5 days, the 6 day was lucky... Thanks to Swami. After darshan, we had breakfast and then went to the foreign canteen to do our seva work. We cleaned turnips and cut tomatoes for salad.

25/2/93 - After that He called us in. I was sitting by Swami's patham (sic). Then Swami told me I got heart problem. But not to worry. That He is going to protect me. Then He asked how's my wife. I told Swami she is okay but she worry too much about me because of my sickness. Swami told me He is going to take care and then Swami started turning His Hand and He produced a ring and asked for my left hand and He slipped the ring in my ring finger. I was so overjoyed I started to tear. I was holding His patham for couple of good minutes. I am the happiest man. Nothing has ever given me this joy. After bhajan I met Mr CR Singh. I told him I had my interview and Swami gave me a Hanuman ring. He was so excited that he held my hand and started kissing the ring and putting the ring on his forehead. He said getting a Hanuman ring from God that I must be a very lucky man. Holding my hand he started reciting Hanuman poem. He stood with me for very long and told me try and refrain from flesh and now I must do Swami's job because it's very rare that someone gets a Hanuman ring. He told me when I get back to SA, I must go to my mother and fall on her feet and tell her how lucky she is to have a son who has got a gift from God, and to tell my wife and children that they have a father who has to do God's job.

27/2/93 - I am sitting looking at my precious ring not believing that I got this ring in my finger. A gift from God. We are now leaving. Prayed at the entrance of the mandir. Kissed the ground then came and prayed to Ganesha and left Prashanthi Nilayam. But I came out with a new life full of happiness and joy. It was my 10 days of ultimate experience which I will never forget. I am now to serve my God, Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba."

-Extracts from the diary of Muthu Krishna Poonen, 46, Stanger

My father, Muthu Krishna Poonen, was a simple, unselfish man. Though our family of six lived in a meagre 2-bedroom municipal flat in Stanger Heights, he ensured that we were never short of anything. But like many men of his time, alcohol was a weakness. One day, while out drinking with his friends, he met an old man who advised him to visit a modest home on the outskirts of Stanger. There, he saw vibuthi emanate from a picture frame, and he felt a presence so strong that it marked the start of his journey to Sai Baba. However, dad also had several cardiac problems which resulted in him being medically boarded from work. At the age of 46, he suffered a severe heart attack and was given only one year to live. With that one year, all he wanted to do was to trace his roots in his motherland, and to see Sai Baba...

So that's how dad ended up in Prashanthi Nilayam in 1993. And true to His word, Swami took care of him. To the extent that dad made several trips to India thereafter, earning a living by buying and selling Eastern wear door-to-door. On his last trip, he took my mother, Shiela, to also see Swami. The photograph of my mother and father standing side by side with the Lord is a priceless reminder of how dear they were to Him. *(Refer: Image m)* Swami extended my father's life by nine years. Right up until the day he died, at the age of 54, he continued to serve and to do 'God's job'.

The truth of my own story, however, begins with the acknowledgement that I was a rebel. I was second in the sibling line-up, born after our speech and hearing-impaired elder sister, before the only son, and before the

youngest 'pet'. My relationship with my parents was a difficult one. I felt ignored and that I wasn't loved as much as the others. It was only after I became a parent myself, that I realised how wrong I was.

I married soon after finishing matric and couldn't wait to get out of Stanger Heights where the 'obsession' with Sai Baba was driving me insane. My father had become a vegetarian, and his whole life pivoted around Swami, Swami, Swami. My husband and I moved to Newlands West, and I joined the local temple where the sentiment was clearly against 'worshipping a man.' And so, I gave all my photo frames of Swami away (Ironically, while I resisted Swami myself, I still sent both my children to Balvikas, where He naturally began to permeate their young hearts). But my turning point would come when my father passed.

My grief, and the regret that I felt for not having spent more time with dad, resulted in a 'homecoming.' Like the slow dawn after a chilly night, I began to yearn to be just like my father. This meant loving Swami unconditionally, like he did. Within a month, I became a vegetarian and began attending the Newlands Sai Centre. With the little money dad left us all in his will, my husband and I together with our two children, visited Prashanthi Nilayam in 2007. When I arrived, I was simply determined to follow in my father's footsteps, using nothing but his diary to guide me. As I sat in darshan, Swami looked directly at me, and I could not stop the flow of tears. I tried hard, because the tears were compromising my vision of Him, but still they poured, in a steady flow of grief, relief and love - in that order.

I have always had low self-esteem. When I was busy with household chores, scrubbing the floors, I would often ask myself: *"What are you doing with your life?"* But when I came back from India, I returned with a quiet determination to study nursing. I was 38 years old, with two children. Nobody, including myself, believed I could do it.

My first interview with the Matron at Gandhi Mandela College was rejected because I hadn't studied maths at school. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, something within me made me quietly drop my CV in the box. A few weeks later, I received a letter requesting that I come in for a pre-selection test at a cost of R200. My husband feared this to be a money-making scheme, but once again, I quietly took the bus to town and took the test anyway. I didn't tell anyone about it, because I feared the embarrassment of failure. But there was definitely a Divine Hand at work. The morning of the selection test, while I was making breakfast for the children before school, I switched on the TV, and overheard a news report pertaining to the SA cricket team. What were the chances that the General Knowledge section of the test would be all about cricket?! I received my acceptance letter to study nursing in the mail on a Thursday morning. I shut my front door, went to my lamp and my photo of Swami, and dropped to my knees…

I passed my first year of study with distinctions. But we had no money left in our savings to pay for my second year. A few days later, I received a call from the college advising that due to my results, I was being awarded a bursary, including a work-back period at City Hospital. Again, I went to my lamp and my photo of Swami and dropped to my knees. As an act of protest against my parents, I had resisted Sai Baba for so many years. And yet, here He was, showering me with so much Love and Compassion.

Since then, Swami has held my hand through every trial and tribulation, and I have never let go. Most recently, when I felt desperately helpless as I watched my own child on the brink of self-destruction, I cried out to Him, *"Swami, what are You doing to me?"* A few months later, I received my answer through my child who said to me, *"Ma, I know Swami is taking care of me. But you are my God."* I was dumbstruck. The gratitude I felt in that moment cannot be put into words.

I will never know why Swami materialized a Hanuman ring for my father. But I do know that Hanuman had great courage and that, in his heart, there was only Lord Ram.

So, whenever I face an obstacle, whenever a pain torments my heart, I know that Swami is busy at work, purifying and strengthening it. So that ultimately, I too can be like Hanuman, with only Swami in my heart.

PAM ROOPANUND, 54
NEWLANDS WEST, DURBAN

58. A SON'S HEARTBEAT CURED BY THE INDWELLER OF THE HEART

It was the early '90s, when we visited Prashanthi Nilayam, together with our two sons, Nimalin and Eesan. One day, Nimalin my elder son who was about 12 years old, was not feeling well. He had a slight temperature and was coughing. We were staying in a North block and in a nearby Roundhouse, the sevadals were running a medical facility. So I told Nimalin to go there and get himself checked. To me, it seemed that he was simply coming down with the flu. However, about 15 to 20 minutes later, Nimalin returned with a note from the doctor.

I was utterly shocked to read that the doctor wanted for my son to urgently see a cardiac specialist. I immediately ran down to see the doctor to ascertain what prompted him to make such a request. He told me that Nimalin had an erratic heartbeat and that this was abnormal. He advised me to see a cardiac specialist at the Sathya Sai Hospital.

I was in a state of panic and extremely concerned about my son. That night I hardly slept. I prayed fervently to Swami for His blessings and that we get line number one the next morning so that we could either speak with Him or touch His Divine Lotus Feet. Through the night, and each time I checked on Nimalin's pulse, I could feel that it was not normal. At times, the pulse stopped for 15 - 20 seconds, followed by a rapid heartbeat, and then a normal heartbeat. It was quite apparent that something was wrong.

The next morning, my prayer was answered when our line was the first to be chosen to enter the Sai Kulwanth hall. We sat in the first row, but there was no guarantee that Swami would walk on our side of the aisle. I began to pray for Him to come close to us. At the appointed time, the darshan music began, and we could see Swami in resplendent glory, walking towards the ladies' section of the hall. With a mind filled with anxiety and concern, I began praying with my eyes fixed on His beautiful form. As He passed the ladies' section, drawing close to where we sat, He was walking on the other side of the aisle. But then suddenly, He walked directly to where the boys and I were seated and stood in front of us for about 10 seconds or more. In those precious moments, I touched His Feet and prayed to Him with only one thought in my mind - that He would take charge of this unexpected situation. Nimalin and Eesan also touched Swami's Feet and prayed.

After darshan, I immediately rushed off to the hospital to arrange for a cardiac specialist to examine Nimalin. I had to see a General Practitioner first before being referred to a specialist. The doctor examined Nimalin and told me that he could not detect any unusual symptoms, nor was there an erratic heartbeat. He told me quite assuredly that there was nothing at all wrong with my son and that there was no point pursuing the matter further. One cannot imagine both the relief and gratitude that filled my heart. If this was not the Divine Doctor at work, then who could it be!

From the depths of my heart, Swami had heard my prayer.
And our Hrudaya Nivasi had responded.

LINKEY MOODLEY, 69
UMHLANGA, DURBAN

The entire kingdom every square inch, belongs to the monarch who rules over it. But when He is inclined to recline, He does not sit on the first spot that He sees, does He? He selects a spot which is clean and free of thorns, which is level and soft.

So too, though all hearts are His, He manifests Himself only in those that are pure. We can adore Him there. We can become aware of Him there. [29]

OM SRI SAI VARADAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Giver of Boons

59. MY WISH FULFILLING TREE

The airport was buzzing like a hive, but fortunately we found our taxi-driver waiting for us. I had lots of sightseeing plans for our first trip to India in 1996. And of course, one of the 'sights' I wished to see was Sai Baba. As the taxi wended its way through the Bangalore traffic, I looked out the backseat window absorbing all the unfamiliar sights and sounds. But what I saw next, made me blink twice…

High up against the clear blue sky was the head-and-shoulder form of Shirdi Sai Baba. In technicolour. Much like one would see a rainbow. I looked at my husband who was sitting in the front, but he was already deep in conversation with the taxi-driver and seemingly oblivious to the vision. I then turned around and looked through the rear window. Nothing. Perhaps I had imagined it… But, what if I hadn't… I kept my eyes peeled to the skies as we journeyed further toward our hotel, and then… I saw it again! This time, the form in the sky, in full colour, was that of Sathya Sai Baba. I was riveted and could not believe my eyes. His head-and-shoulder-form, complete with orange robe and black curly hair, remained still for a few seconds, before eventually dissipating, much like a cloud of smoke. This was my first darshan of the Lord. An ethereal, mesmerising darshan from the sky.

But I was also fortunate to have His 'usual' darshan the very next day at the Whitefield ashram where I ended up in the first line of a block and could enjoy an unobstructed and close view of Sathya Sai Baba in the more physical sense. But something happened on that fateful first trip. Because I found myself going back to see Him almost every year and, when possible, I would stay for 5-6 weeks on end. I am very grateful for being blessed with the opportunity to have had Swami's darshan so regularly. Through it, He slowly reshaped my life in ways I possibly do not even understand. But, as with my technicolour vision in the sky, there are a few other stand-out memories from these annual pilgrimages worth sharing.

It was 1998 and I was preparing to travel with my sisters to Prashanthi. I have always suffered from very heavy menstrual bleeds, so shortly before our departure date, I visited the local hospital in Stanger to get some medication that would hopefully stop my period. On the contrary, following an ultrasound, the radiologist told me that I had multiple fibroids and cautioned me against any travel. He urged that I prioritise a hysterectomy instead. I ignored him.

But a few days later, I was lying in a hotel room in Bangalore, unable to stand up due to the pain. I had to get down on my knees and crawl to the bathroom. Having witnessed my desperate state, my sisters returned from darshan in Whitefield with a doctor who was also a Sai devotee. He gave me an injection for the pain and suggested that he book me into hospital the following day for a hysterectomy. I remained stubborn, but politely replied, *"I'll let you know."*

Two days later, we followed Swami to Prashanthi Nilayam. I was still bleeding very heavily, and the pain was returning with a vengeance, so I made my way to the General Hospital. I was given another injection for the pain, and for the third time in one week, a doctor told me I needed to have my uterus removed. I was 46 years old at the time and evidently there was no other option. I began to cry like a baby. How could I, a South African, undergo major surgery, far away from home?! At which point the kindly doctor said to me: *"Why are you crying? Don't you know that your Mother is right here?"* She then gave me a prescription for three medications which I was to fill at a nearby pharmacy. However, when I reached the pharmacy, I was told that only one medication was available and that I needed to return the next day for the balance. That was it. I'd had enough. It was all just too much.

There and then, on the streets of Puttaparthi, I cried out to Swami, in my mind. *"Swami, this is it. I'm here in Your Holy Land. Only You can make me well. This is the last medicine I am taking. Tomorrow, I am not taking anymore. If You cannot cure me, then nobody can."* Well, the next day, there was a notable reduction in my bleeding to the point that I could actually go for darshan twice a day. Over the next four days, it continued to decrease, before stopping completely. I knew that a miracle had taken place within my body. But still, I visited a gynaecologist when I returned home to South Africa and told him about the recommendation from three different doctors for me to have a hysterectomy. His response almost made me laugh: *"You have a perfect uterus. You don't even need any medication. They were all lying to you because they want to make money!"* I could not tell him about the Divine Doctor, so I just smiled. After two months, my periods resumed, but this time, it was a normal flow. At the age of 54, I went through a normal menopause; I am now in my 70s and I still have my uterus.

The following year, I was back in Prashanthi, and this time perfectly capable of even climbing the rocks up to the Wish Fulfilling Tree (there were no stairs back then). Poised on a rock beyond the tree so that I could take in the view, I took my time to carefully pen my wish on a piece of paper. I then prayed and tied the paper to the mystical tree. But the days and weeks passed. Three days before I was to leave for home, I sat in darshan and mentally said, *"Swami, I'm going home in 3 days. And still, you haven't answered my letter."* For the next two days, I made the same supplication. *"Swami, I'm going home in 2 days. And still, you haven't answered my letter."* And then, *"Swami, I'm going home tomorrow..."*

That afternoon, I felt disappointed to have received a token that put me towards the back of the Sai Kulwant Hall. However, I managed to get an aisle seat, and settled down, deep in prayer, with my eyes closed. When darshan began, I didn't seem to register it, because my eyes remained closed. Until I felt a nudge. I looked to the person to my left who had prodded me, and saw that she was looking up, towards my right. Following her eyes, I too looked up. And there, standing right beside me, was Swami! In a route that was totally out of the ordinary, Swami had turned down the aisle on the ladies' side and come to the back of the Sai Kulwant Hall. And now He was standing right in front of me, looking straight into my eyes. For a good few seconds, the Lord stood still. Looking deep into my eyes. And I, into His. And then Swami turned around, and resumed his normal darshan course.

The letter that I had tied to the Wish Fulfilling Tree contained the following request: *"Swami, I believe in You. But I would really like to make eye contact with You."*

Yes, I'd had the vision in the sky. And yes, I'd had my fibroids miraculously cured. But I was still relatively new in the organization. And I hadn't experienced Him up close and personal. Until that moment. It was the most beautiful and heavenly eye contact. Beyond all my expectations.

Over the years, the nature of my requests has changed. But Swami has always heard me…

… Like when I walked up to the Wish Fulfilling Tree on another occasion and found that I had no matches to light my agarbathi. Feeling disappointed, I closed my eyes to pray, only to feel something brush up against my foot. It was the tiniest box of matches I had ever seen, with only 5 matches barely 1cm in length. But they did a fine job of lighting my agarbathi.

… Like the time my two sisters and I were seated in the front row for darshan and Swami took my letter as well as that of my younger sister. When I realised that He had not taken my elder sister's letter (because she is far less pushy and more disciplined), I cried out, *"Swami! Aka's letter!"* Our beloved Swami actually turned around and came back to fetch Aka's letter from her hands. She was over the moon with joy.

… And like the time I was praying at the Meditation Tree when I was granted a vision of myself sitting cross-legged, with a baby in each arm. While not understanding it at the time, a few days later, I received a call from my son in London, who had actually been in my prayers. He was calling to let me know, that after nine years, he and his wife were expecting twins!

Yes, Swami fulfills our every need - from matches and heavenly eye contact, to menstrual cures and heaven-sent children. Our beloved Baba is the Wish-Fulfilling Tree, always ready to shower His Grace.

I thank You Swami from the bottom of my heart, for Your Love knows no bounds.

SHIRLEY GOVENDER, 73
STANGER, KZN

60. THE UNSEEN HAND

"And here you have a baby born with a veil."

I can still hear the obstetrician's words so clearly as he gathered all the nursing staff around him to come and view the rare occurrence. Moments before, I had seen a bright light that was very different from the clinical theatre lights. But I never got to see my son's veil. When the doctor removed him from my womb, at 35 weeks, it was upstaged by something far more critical. My baby boy was not crying…

We had waited 10 years for him. After 1,5 years of fertility treatment, we were beginning to lose all hope of having another child. Then, in December 2010, my husband and I, together with our firstborn son, went to Prashanthi Nilayam as part of the South African Christmas pilgrimage. This was my first trip and it was a truly special one. Of course we didn't know it at the time, but it was to be Swami's final Christmas darshan. That day, Swami just sat in His wheelchair, staring at all of us, very gently, very quietly, for a long time. He just sat and looked at us. Then, just before He could retire for the evening, He lifted both His Hands in blessing. First, He blessed the ladies, then the men. And then, He did it again! He moved both His Hands to bless the ladies, and then again, the men. Everybody sitting in the Sai Kulwant Hall received a double Abhaya Hasta blessing! While we were all brimming with delight at our good fortune, I'm sure most of us did not understand its full import. Still, before returning home to South Africa, my 10-year-old son and I made sure we walked up the hill behind the ashram to the famous Kalpavriksha Tree. With the same wish in both our hearts, the two of us penned our desire for a baby in a letter, which we then attached to the mystical wish-fulfilling tree.

Five months later, I discovered I was pregnant.

Needless to say, we were overjoyed. I recognised what a blessing it was, and so I did my best to bring some balance to my life. Unfortunately, my work commitments still got the best of me. I was not resting much, and by October, I was already suffering from extreme exhaustion. Then in December, at my routine scan, my doctor looked grave. Based on the poor health of my placenta, he instructed that our baby needed to be delivered as soon as possible.

... So there we were, in a cold operating theatre, with a newborn baby, that was just not signalling his entry into the world. The moments passed, but no cry ushered forth. His Apgar score was assessed: 1/10. My husband and I began to panic. And the nurses began to prod my baby and turn him upside-down. Then… out of a tiny

mouth… emerged a single cry… followed by silence. It was at this point that the paediatrician walked in and administered a surfactant to support my baby's undeveloped lungs. I was not allowed to touch my child at all. He was whisked away to the neonatal ICU where his Apgar score improved to 6/10. But for the next two weeks, all I could do was to watch him through the glass of an incubator.

And during those two weeks, I sank into the depths of depression.

I felt helpless. I felt like I had come so far, and yet, here I was, about to lose my miracle baby. My emotions got the better of me, as I just could not handle seeing my baby in such distress. And my despair worsened when, one by one, other babies in the neonatal unit were discharged. Those were the worst two weeks of my life. But as dark and traumatic as it was, I refused to be medicated. Through the storm of hormones, chemicals and emotions, raging through my body and mind, something inside of me held on. I prayed. I chanted the Gayathri mantra. I put a dot of vibuthi on his forehead. I did it all automaton. Nothing I did was intentional. But I did it every day.

Slowly, my baby got stronger. And so did I.

Armed with a two-month's supply of paediatric medication, the two of us finally went home. And my depression began to lift. With increasing mental clarity, I began to see what I had not seen before: If not for Swami, my baby would have died, or at best, suffered a severe disability. Swami had worked in silence. While I had felt the pain and anguish of the experience, somehow Swami had removed its weight. He was the Unseen Hand who had worked yet another miracle in our lives. It was then that it dawned on me…

The double blessing! That was my double blessing from God.
I was blessed with a baby.
My baby was blessed to survive.

My son is now a teenager and has done far more than survive. Today, he is thriving, as a happy, healthy and smart young boy. While I am not sure if, being born with a veil means he is uniquely gifted or destined for greatness, I have no doubt that, for as long as he has Swami's Grace and Love, he has everything.

Our knowledge of Swami's miracles in our everyday lives is limited to only that which we can experience through our senses. But what about all those miracles that we are not aware of? Only He knows the extent of the Grace bestowed upon each of us. I may not know the full extent bestowed upon me, but for His Unseen Hand, which holds up my life, I am eternally grateful.

ANONYMOUS, 51
DURBAN

61. AN UNEXPECTED GIFT

In 2022, I was asked to write a script for a play that was to be staged in Prashanthi during the pilgrimage that was to take place the next year. Swami helped in every way. He stimulated the ideas, sent the people, and in fact provided everything needed to make the play happen.

Intuitively, I also felt Swami tell me to add a guided meditation at the end of the play. It was to be about the Power of Collective Consciousness and required imagining a perfect world while focusing on Swami holding

the Lingam. The more people hold that vision, the faster it will manifest. Before the play, Swami also told me to memorize the meditation and to let Him speak through me. It was not easy because of my memory issues, but I trusted Him, and I practiced.

The play was a success and was received very positively. I honestly felt like I had done nothing, and that Swami had done everything through me. I was just happy to be His instrument, and I expressed my gratitude when I visited the Sai Sannidhi one last time.

As I was leaving for a holiday in Kashmir the next day, the production team and I gathered for one final meal before parting ways, each of us bound for different destinations. Seated around a large table, we placed our orders, soaking in the bittersweet moment of farewell.

Then, amidst the warmth of the gathering, a man clad all in white garb, approached. "*Who did the guided meditation?*" he asked. The team pointed to me. There was something about the man — an air of quiet authority, of knowing. He motioned to someone nearby and a moment later, what seemed to be an assistant returned, bearing in his hands, something small, something carefully chosen…

Without ceremony, the stately man in white placed the object in my palm. It was a moonstone crystal, smooth and shaped in the form of a Lingam. No bag, no explanation — just a direct, silent offering. He handed me his card. He was Swami Sneham. And then he left.

I received the stone with great surprise, but I promptly took it and put it away so as not to draw attention to myself and this miraculous gift. A gift, unexpected and unspoken, yet deeply significant and which left me in awe. You see, Swami had manifested a very similar crystal in Kashmir many years ago. And I was traveling to Kashmir the very next day! *(Refer: Image n & o)*

Later, I told an elder from the organization about this experience. He reflected, *"Swami had no other way to give you this gift except through that man."* I felt this to be a powerful blessing and a big acknowledgment from Swami. I was completely humbled. This is what I live for — to be His servant.

When I returned to South Africa, I tried to make contact with Swami Sneham to plough him with questions, but he never replied. I found out that he is extremely busy with seva of all kinds.

I still hold onto that moment. The stone remains with me, as a quiet reminder of something beyond words — a connection, a blessing, a mystery waiting to unfold.

When I brought it home and started holding it in my hand to pray, I would have this tingly feeling in my forehead, as though this stone was expanding my consciousness.

I guess I'm a sucker for magical mystical experiences. But this one topped them all!
Thank You, Swami. For my moonstone crystal.
And for absolutely every other blessing I have ever received.
You are my Rock!

PANU CHETTY, 53
CENTURION, JOHANNESBURG

62. "WITH LOVE. SRI SATHYA SAI BABA"

My interaction with Sri Sathya Sai Baba started at the early age of 12. I was fascinated with His manifestations and miracles and must confess that these were the main reasons I was so attracted to Him.

My enquiring mind was on overdrive. I got hold of an old cassette with Swami singing bhajans and I played it daily, over and over again. Those bhajans transported me into another dimension. They were the most beautiful bhajans I had ever heard.

Once over the holidays, I was staying at my aunt and uncle's place in Parlock where many miracles were taking place at the time. I decided to use the opportunity to 'test' these phenomena because a part of me couldn't believe it. So I wrote a lengthy letter to Swami in which I asked Him to please help me sing bhajans because I had no singing experience whatsoever. Even my nursery rhymes were so bad and out of tune!

That night I placed the sealed letter at the shrine and went to sleep. The next morning, I was awoken by my aunt frantically trying to get me up. When I asked her what happened she told me that my letter was blessed and covered with vibuthi. I jumped out of bed and ran to the shrine and, lo and behold, it was blessed indeed - covered with vibuthi, kumkum and marigold petals! I cried and laughed at the same time. I just couldn't believe what I was seeing.

I gathered all the treasured manifestations into a wax paper and then I carefully opened the sealed envelope, only to discover that it too was filled with vibuthi, kumkum and marigold petals. As I emptied the envelope, I ended up with a heap of vibuthi. I then opened and straightened out the letter and there too, I found the same. Not only was my letter simply covered with vibuthi, kumkum and marigold petals, but written at the bottom of the page, in kumkum, in His very own handwriting, Swami had also crafted me a long personal message…

Amongst other things, He said, **"Don't worry my child. I will always help you to sing bhajans. I will always be with you. With love. Sri Sathya Sai Baba"**. Swami's very own signature!

Ever since that day, I began singing bhajans locally and throughout the country and even on radio. I practiced singing all the bhajans that Swami sang on the "cassette" and tried to sing it as powerfully as He did.

Many years later when my husband and I had the good fortune of meeting Swami personally in a private interview, I had the opportunity to thank Swami for blessing me and teaching me how to sing. He put His Divine Hand on my head and said: **"Yes, yes, I know. Very loud and powerful singing! I bless you!"**

…and so began my faith and devotion to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.
I have never ever doubted that He was The Lord Himself.
I feel truly blessed and grateful indeed!

JOTHI COOPPAN, 68
MORNINGSIDE, DURBAN

63. A BIRTHDAY WISH COME TRUE

In 2002, I turned 50. My heart was set on spending that milestone birthday in Prashanthi Nilayam. The yearning to be at the ashram has always been there like all other times, except this time, I really prayed that Swami would make my birthday wish come true.

Soon, my desire became a reality, and I was on a plane to the most auspicious place on earth, a place that has always felt like home to me. My eldest sister was accompanying me, and I was so very excited to be at my Lord's abode once again.

When we arrived in Puttaparthi, my sister and I spent our time soaking in all the ashram activities. My birthday felt so special. My long-held craving had been fulfilled, and my heart was full. Little did I know that 10 days later, my ultimate dream would come to pass...

You see, all the while I was at the ashram, I had been helping an African lady and her 18-year-old son from King Williams Town. Just lending them a helping hand whenever I could because it was their first trip. By the time we became really acquainted, they had already had two interviews with Swami. On 5 October, I made my way with them to the darshan line and scored myself row number five. We sat patiently as usual soaking in the divine atmosphere. When Swami arrived, He walked past me and called the African lady and her son for an interview. I was so excited for them. However, a few moments later, the lady beckoned to me to join her. I motioned back that I couldn't, because my scarf was different from hers, and that Swami wouldn't allow it. But she insisted that I join her, and so I stood up. As I walked towards her, all the other South Africans stood up to join me, and within minutes, they were all there on the verandah beside me.

The lady said to me that Swami had asked her to bring three people along with her. When Swami finally approached, He looked at everyone, and indicated where the interview cut-off was. Two young girls and I were to be included. I was shocked. Was I actually going to have an interview with Swami? It seemed totally unreal, like a dream. The feeling was indescribable - words will never do it justice.

Swami then called us inside and spoke a lot to the lady and her son. The interview was not rushed - it was as though time had stood still. During this time, we had the privilege of observing a few materializations right in front of us. Swami joked with the young son who was reluctant to return an emerald ring that Swami had seemingly materialised for him in an earlier interview. When he eventually did, Swami laughed and blew on the ring three times, turning it into a diamond ring instead!

After much interaction, Swami then asked for a few of the 'girls' to go to the inner room. At which point I thought: *"Swami, I am hardly a girl - I just turned 50!"* But it seems that Swami has a different view on age as He pointed me towards the others. It was a moment arrested in eternity for me, as I ponder every word of the Avatar. When we entered the inner room, He told the two girls to sit. But as I entered the small space, Swami said: **"Kuso"**, which means 'come sit' in Telugu, indicating to me that He knew I was of Telugu-speaking origin. He then pointed me to the floor by His Feet.

He asked me my name and when I told him, He said, **"Oh! Very good Indian name."** He then showed us His palm and asked what it was. He then proceeded to say: **"Nothing is everything and everything is nothing."** A clue perhaps to finding balance in the duality of life - I will leave that up to you to decide. Swami also said to me personally that there was no marriage for me but that I must not worry about my future - He would take care of me. With folded hands, I said thank you.

My beloved Lord has done just that. I am now 72 years old, and all I can say is that when Swami makes a promise, He keeps it. My life is testimony to that promise. His Love for us is beyond anything we can perceive.

INDRANI NAIDOO, 72
GREENWOOD PARK, DURBAN

Dear one

Listen! Sathya Sai who resides in your heart, your loving Mai (mother) is heaping ananda on you! He is blessing you that you may have a long life, sound health, peace of mind, devotion to God, detachment from transient objects of the world and success in the search for your own Truth, your Reality.

May you, your children and your grandchildren be happy and prosperous; may you spread delight all around you; may you get confirmed in the role of the witness, content with the contemplation of the manifold leelas of God in all that you see; may you be ever in good and Godly company and may your hours be spent in the recapitulation of the glories of God.

Here! Hold forth your palm! Receive the amrit I am offering, the amrit of Love. No nectar can be sweeter and more invigorating.

Baba[30]

OM SRI SAI BHAKTA VATSALAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who has Motherly Love for the Devotee

64. FOOTPRINTS IN MY HEART

My first experience with Swami was an emotionally charged one – filled with deep sadness on the one hand, and inexplicable happiness on the other.

My sister was 4 years old when she died. I was an excited 6 year old rushing home from school, with sweets to share with my siblings, when I learnt of the freak accident at home that would change the course of our lives. My sister never returned from the hospital, and my mother never returned home the same.

She could never forgive herself, and for many years, she struggled with chronic depression. Despite desperate visits to various places of worship, and eventual psychiatric treatment, my mother died by suicide in 1992. By then, I was 32 years old, but it felt like my world was toppling over. In between her bouts of depression, my mother was the most loving and caring person, but the grief she carried was eventually too overwhelming for her. I was distraught.

A few days after her passing, I had a dream where Swami was walking down the passage of my mother's house. As He passed the doorway of the room I was in, He looked directly at me and gave me the most incredible smile. In that moment, I felt an indescribable joy wash over me. The next morning, I grabbed a book about Sai Baba that had been given to me a year earlier by my cousin, but at which time I had no interest in reading. Now, I began to voraciously consume everything I could about this God-man living in India.

Exactly one week after my dream, and just before we could perform my mother's 16-day ceremony, I went to our shrine to pray. As was my family's custom, a tray of mielie meal had been placed at the shrine, together with other prayer items. I was shocked to find two distinct footprints, clearly discernible in the mielie meal. By now, I knew Sai Baba's Feet, and there was no doubt in my mind that the one footprint was His. The other footprint was that of a little child – you could say, a 4 year old child!

This life-changing experience was the turning point for our family. We travelled to see Sai Baba in Puttaparthi and even my grief-stricken father became a believer who went on to have many wonderful experiences with Swami.

For me, those footprints represented the most reassuring signal from Swami – that He knows everything, and that everything would be ok. We have never looked back since that day. Because we now know that Swami walks with us, Hand in hand.

The love of a mother is like no other. When my dear mother had to leave, the Divine Mother entered my heart, forever.

SARAS PADAYACHEE, 65
STANGER, KZN

65. THE SACRED BOND

Life has taught me that clinging to Swami's Feet is not just an option for me – it is my very anchor. Among countless precious memories, one particular experience shines with a sacred glow.

It was October 2007, and I was almost seven months pregnant when a dream of Swami unfolded. All my life, guidance and solace have come to me through dreams. Even when they were silent, these dreams of Swami offered me comfort and strength. I've always held onto these divine encounters; they have been my lifeline during adversity, drawing me closer to God when I needed Him most.

In that vivid dream, I was standing on the verandah of my home, and Swami was right before me, talking. An overwhelming rush of love enveloped me. Swami, resplendent in His orange robe and afro hair, just as we see in His photographs, looked at me and smiled. Then, His hand gently graced my swollen belly and He asked, **"How is my baby? How is she? I want to see you all there for Dasara."** I was left breathless, thinking.... Swami wants us to come to India for Dasara! The thought resonated deep within me, an impossible, yet beautiful reality.

I awoke the next morning, my mind reeling, repeating, *"OMG, I dreamt of Swami!"* The dream was as crystal clear as the morning light. I immediately relayed every detail to my husband. Without a moment's hesitation, he said that I had to go. At the time, it wasn't feasible for my husband, our son, and myself, to travel together. So I joined a friend who also happened to be journeying alone, on this miraculous pilgrimage. I was disappointed that my family couldn't join, but it was eclipsed by the immense joy of a personal invitation from the Lord Himself. This was a special gift indeed! Before I could fully process it, I was on a plane, soaring towards Puttaparthi.

Despite my advanced pregnancy, arriving at the ashram was an incredible experience. Every day, I was showered with special privileges. Random strangers would approach me, their eyes filled with warmth, telling me how blessed I was, and how blessed my unborn baby was. During my two weeks in Prashanthi Nilayam, I had the unparalleled opportunity to see Swami often. First, at morning darshan, then at the daily yajna where Swami would offer samagri into the fire, and again at afternoon darshan. I never missed a single chance to bask in the unconditional love that radiated from our Swami. My heart swelled with gratitude. After the profound losses of my father and brother the year before, Swami was keeping me safe, keeping me loved. Seeing Swami every day transported me to a world of pure bliss – a feeling so intense, so consuming, that it is almost impossible to describe. It consumed every fibre of my being. The immense boon of being in the presence of our Lord infused me with hope. I felt a love unlike any I had ever known.

I also felt that the special calling was not just for me, but intimately tied to the unborn baby I carried within me. At the time, I couldn't grasp the full meaning, but now, eighteen years later, it all makes sense. From her name, to the person she has become, to the unfolding of her life – that precious calling was all for my daughter. For me, looking back at the tapestry of my life, it was for me to understand my sacred role as her mother, to bring her safely into this world, guided by His Grace. With the wisdom that comes with a bird's-eye view of the past eighteen years, I can truly say I've come full circle. I now understand the profound significance of being in Prashanthi Nilayam, pregnant with a beautiful soul, during the most auspicious time dedicated to the Divine Mothers – Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi - all in Swami's sacred presence.

This gift, this divine experience, is one I will cherish and hold onto for the rest of my life. For it gives me hope in my times of uncertainty.

But these things I know for sure:

I know that nothing happens without His Divine Will.
I know that every soul is unique, and travelling a unique journey.
And, most importantly, I know that the sacred bond between the Creator and His Creation is Love, and it can never be broken.

YOGINIE NAIDOO, 48
LA MERCY, DURBAN

"The mother will bear all the burden of pregnancy and all the strain of delivery but she will not wish ill for the child that gives her all that strain. She will only wish it well.

So too I will bear all the burdens you place on Me, all the bother you give. I can only wish you well and bless you."[31]

OM SRI SAI SADHU JANA POSHANAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Guards and Guides Good People

66. MY KURUKSHETRA, MY SAI KRISHNA

I remember when words
were wielded like weapons against me.
I stood hollow, aching,
each syllable a wound.

In my pain, I pleaded with You,
"Baba, how can I love all and serve all
when some bring me so much sorrow?
You alone know what is best.
Please, guide me."

And in that very moment,
Your answer arrived.
A daily message of Bhagawan's I had subscribed to,
but today, it felt destined.

It read something along these lines
"There are those who, when they die, people will shed tears.
And there are those who,
when they cross your path,
make you shed tears.
They should be avoided."

A whisper from the Divine.
A shield of wisdom.
In that moment, Baba
You wrapped me in Your love,
offered me Your guidance,
and reminded me that loving all, included myself.

People come and go.
Even those who stay
cannot walk every step with me.
I left them in the waiting room, when I entered the operation room.

But I took You with me.
Every step.
You never leave me.

No matter how many times I have been broken,
Your grace and love piece me back together,
more resilient and stronger.
And I march on… your Sai warrior.

ANONYMOUS, 43
JOHANNESBURG

67. A GRANDMOTHER'S LIGHT

I was just 4 years old when my grandmother first introduced me to the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. Her devotion to Swami was unwavering, and her faith lit up our home like a warm, glowing lamp. She would often tell us stories of His love and miracles, her voice brimming with conviction. At that tender age, I didn't fully understand what faith meant, but I could feel it in the way she spoke about Him. Through my grandmother, Swami entered my heart as a little girl.

As I grew older, life brought its share of challenges. There were moments of doubt, hardship, and uncertainty, but my grandmother's steadfast faith became my anchor, especially during the time that I lived with her. She was the one who enrolled me into high school, and when, as a teenager, I became lost and overwhelmed by personal struggles, she sat me down and reminded me of one of Swami's simple teachings: **"Why fear when I am here."** In that moment, I felt Swami's presence envelope me, and bring peace to my troubled heart. That is when I joined the Balvikas class as a student. As I grew older, I also grew closer to Swami, until He became my closest friend and confidante. In 1997, I even attended Swami's 20th birthday celebrations… in my dream! In it, I went up to my best friend and gave Him a big kiss, unreservedly!

In my early thirties, inspired by my grandmother's legacy and Swami's teachings, I enrolled both my children in Balvikas and began to teach it myself. It was an act of service that deepened my connection to Him. The children's innocent smiles and pure hearts reminded me of Swami's love for humanity, and I felt His guidance in every lesson plan, every prayer session, every workshop.

In 1999, I had a dream in which I was doing 'admin' work for Swami in his inner interview room. Sorting through the ton of paperwork, I complained to Swami that the task was an impossible one. *"No!"* He replied. **"It is possible. I am preparing you for something bigger."** Of course, I did not understand what He meant at the time. But with hindsight, the Divine Plan always becomes clearer to us. For me, teaching wasn't just about imparting knowledge — it was a spiritual journey, a pathway to sharing His message of love and selfless service. It was this understanding that drove me to start the first Balvikas programme in Laudium, which required driving long distances to and from class each week. I also rose up the organisational ranks from Centre Chair to Regional President and then to National Education Convenor. Taking on these leadership roles within the Sai organisation was very humbling, but also very challenging. I often doubted my abilities, but each time, Swami's words and His invisible hand guided me.

Once in 2019, during Gauteng's first major production, entitled The Golden Jubilee, I was on the verge of giving up. We had about 360 children from different regions participating in the production and we began to encounter problems with the venue. Seeking an alternative venue would come at significant cost, and we just did not have the funds. The night before the big rehearsal, I was at my wits end, and went to bed desperately asking Swami what to do. I then had a dream in which I saw Swami seated in the middle of all the production children. He looked up at me and smiled. Then, He threw a ring with three green stones at me. I had always envied the emerald rings that Swami would materialise for some lucky devotees, so much so that my late sister had even gifted me a ring with a green oval stone. So I took this 'dream ring' as a sign of Swami fulfilling my wish, entrusting me with a duty, and acknowledging my readiness to deliver. Perhaps the three stones symbolised our past, present, and future together, or a karmic bond being sealed or released - I don't know. And yes…I caught the ring. All that matters is that it was a Divine blessing indeed.

The next day, as I was describing our venue dilemma to another teacher and expressing my uncertainty as to what to do, a devotee overheard our conversation and came forward with an offer to fully sponsor a new venue, at a significantly increased cost! Such generosity could only have been made possible, at exactly the right moment, by the Grace of our Lord. More than 2000 people ended up attending the professional production, which was crowned with a standing ovation by the audience. Through it, I learned that we are merely actors in Swami's Play - He has already scripted it, and He will ensure its performance.

Looking back, my journey into Swami's fold has been a collection of moments where faith blossomed, challenges transformed into opportunities, and His divine presence illuminated my path. Even in our darkest hours, His Love is the constant that will always guide us home. Today, I just focus on experiencing Swami's Omnipresence in my life, knowing fully well that everything we seek is already within us. And I try to remember that when the path gets tough, He is always a step ahead of us. All we need is Faith, Patience and Love.

It is only now that I am coming to understand the wisdom and passion my grandmother had. Like her, perhaps I too, will one day be able to shine a light for the generations to come.

NISHA SEWPERSAD, 56
PRETORIA

68. TOO MANY

My journey towards Swami started in the 80's when I was searching for some sort of divine intervention for my son who suffered from asthma. Friends from Umhlatuzana then introduced us to Sai Baba. We began attending the weekly satsangs and sent both our children to Balvikas. In 1994, my family and I had the opportunity to travel to Prashanthi Nilayam. The first time I laid eyes on Swami's Physical Form was a mindboggling experience for me. I could not contain the tears which just rolled down my face uncontrollably.

When we moved to Avoca Hills, I joined another Sai centre where I was encouraged to become a Balvikas teacher. Little did I realise that this would become my life's passion. At the time I worked as an insurance consultant, and had no one to take care of my children while I was at work. My company began toying with the idea of opening a daycare centre for its employees, but unfortunately, that did not materialise. But the seed had been planted in me!

Being an insurance consultant was not a job that I particularly enjoyed, so I felt increasingly motivated to open a daycare centre myself. After all, I also understood firsthand the stress and guilt that working mothers can sometimes feel. So in 2000, I resigned from my job and opened my own daycare centre. My only dream was to spend time with children and to spread Swami's teachings. And so for the next 18 years, I had the good fortune of teaching Educare to a multi-racial group of little children.

In 2001, a year after opening the daycare, I attended the Educare Conference in Prashanthi Nilayam. It was an experience of a life time, where Swami addressed us delegates directly, and reminded us of our role as teachers and the purpose of true education. One day, during darshan, Swami walked past me and collected a letter from a person directly behind me. As He did so, I heard Him say the words: **"Too many."** No one else heard this, but me. I realised immediately what He had meant, because at the time, my mind was swirling with far too many thoughts – should I visit my cousins in Vishakhapatnam; should I take the train; maybe flying would be better etc etc!

Those two words have been a potent lesson for me in my life. I have learnt not to do too many things at once. This inevitably leads to too many uncontrollable thoughts. And that I need to plan far better than I do. And then of course, to leave everything in His care!

In 2004, I received an award from the Umgeni Region for Distinction in the Educare Programme. It means the world to me, as does the feedback I sometimes still get from parents and children who are now grown, expressing appreciation for the grounding they received through the programme.

Swami used my son's asthma to lead me to Him, and He used an unhappy job to reveal my life's purpose. With Swami's Grace my son is much better, and I am now a grandmother having travelled a fulfilling journey. I am eternally grateful to Bhagawan for giving me the strength and good health to accomplish my purpose, and for continuing to be the Guiding Force in all that I do.

ROSE APPALRAJU, 74
MAURITIUS/ SOUTH AFRICA

69. A PAINFULLY SHY INTROVERT FINDS HER VOICE

When I was an 18 year-old law student, my parents' went through a divorce. I struggled to maintain contact with my father. I lost my elder brother. And my mother never fully recovered from all the intense grief she was forced to endure over such a short period. I became financially responsible for my family and had to take the difficult decision to stop studying. However, with no experience or qualifications, finding a job was virtually impossible, so I chose to then pursue a career in teaching.

I was a painfully shy introvert. When we had to participate in debating, I recall a professor saying to me, "*Young lady, please do not choose any profession where you have to speak to people.*" It was only through Swami's grace and my love for the education of children, that I was able to graduate as a teacher. There were no positions available in KwaZulu-Natal, so I had to teach in Eldorado Park, Gauteng where I boarded with a family, headed by an elderly couple who kept us on a very strict spiritual programme. This was where my sadhana really began, because bhajans and prayers were daily practices in this home.

I did not choose teaching, teaching chose me. I loved the children of the Eldorado Park community and I was committed to doing my best as their English teacher. It was here that my outreach work took on a new meaning in apartheid South Africa. There were many socio-economic challenges in this area, but I was blessed with an excellent management team, who mentored me with care. It was a very emotional day when I eventually left Eldorado Park after five years. My teaching career has spanned 31 years in mainstream schools, including a special needs school, and 5 years teaching EHV classes at the Sandton Sai centre.

When I look back on those days, I know there were many difficult and challenging times. But as Swami teaches us, it does not matter what job we do, as long as it's an honest job, that it causes no harm, and that we do our very best. Our success is not measured by titles or degrees, but by the lives we have touched and by the quality of our lives.

Still, my commitment to education and self-improvement is unceasing - I never stopped studying, and finally completed my LLB in 2024. But my life is dedicated to serving God, to personal sadhana, to understanding the scriptures, and most importantly, to community outreach work. The aspect of the Sai movement that has

always resonated with me is that 50% of one's journey is comprised of one's own sadhana, and 50% is comprised of the positive difference we make in the world. To help me with this, I have used Swami's values of Love and Truth as my guide through life.

When I turned 40, I vowed to travel to Prashanthi Nilayam for three years in a row, and to take both my mother and my mother-in-law on at least one of those trips. I longed to see Swami and His outreach work. But when I looked at my mother, a devotee of Shirdi Baba, and watched her tears as she saw Swami, I was in awe of her unwavering faith. As I watched the devotees in Prashanthi, the sevadals, as well as the people who work closest to Swami, all brimming with love, devotion and faith, I knew that this was the Heavenly Abode of the Divine.

As South Africans, we are generally very westernised and caught up in the corporate world of the big cities. But when we reach Prashanthi, all we feel is Swami's Grace, His blessings, and His peace. Like a car that has gone into the garage for a full service, we emerge feeling fully recharged and energised for the world of work and family. We leave behind our material comforts, and feel content in the ashram's simple room. We manage the heat in cool white clothing, and perform much of our own washing and daily tasks. We get used to the cold baths, and enjoy the delicious food and satsang. Just being on the same property as Swami is the most spiritually elevating experience.

During our third trip, I was very troubled by some issues at the school I was serving at as Senior Educator at the time. One day, my daughters and I volunteered to assist at the Western canteen. It was still empty and the ladies were just finishing the lunch preparations. As we sat down to help, I found a page with the Prayer of Surrender on it. After reading it, I knew that Swami had answered my prayers and I felt a sense of peace and calm come over me. Shortly thereafter, another SA devotee told me to follow her after satsang, and for three days, my husband and I were allowed entry into the mandir for meditation. It was an indescribable experience, but the words that come to my mind are: Eternity, Peace, and Union with the Divine. When I emerged from the mandir on our last day, I could not find my sandals anywhere. I simply said to Swami: *"I know that this is your playful trick as I am now leaving the ashram."* Either that, or someone else needed those sandals more!

I have faced many joys and many challenges over the years. But the day that Swami took Maha Samadhi was the most painful and emotionally challenging day of our family's life. Our home came to a standstill for a week. That is when I realised my family and I owe Swami everything. When I veered towards atheism, Swami was my Guru, my Spiritual Master, who taught me all about divinity, surrender and unwavering faith.

2025 has been a very challenging year with my mother being critically ill and then passing in July, at the age of 84. For me, my mother was one of Swami's greatest devotees, so it is almost fitting that she passed in the centenary year of our Lord. I will forever be grateful to her for having started me on the Sai path, when I was but 5-years-old. I find infinite solace, comfort, and peace in the knowledge that she now rests in the arms of our beloved Swami.

Ultimately, it is Swami who has been our CEO and Divine Director, not just in this lifetime, but over many lifetimes. I pray that He lives in our hearts for all eternity.

PREMILLA SUBRAMONEY, 59
SANDTON, JOHANNESBURG

My dear

Have all your attachments reversed from every object and concentrate yourself on one thing, one fact, one truth - your divinity.

Immediately, on the spot, you gain realisation.

Nothing is done in a day. Religion cannot be swallowed in the form of a pill. It requires hard and constant practice. The mind can be conquered only by slow and steady practice.

My dear! You are the embodiment of God. Fill yourselves with the thought of your almightiness, your majesty and your glory. Open the gates of wisdom. Enter the abode of bliss. Rest in peace forever.

I am always in you, with you.

With love

Baba[32]

OM SRI SAI SARVA BHAYA NIVAARINE NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Dissolves all Fears

70. EXPANDED CONSCIOUSNESS IN A CONFINED SPACE

"When your eyes awaken to the morning sun, pray to Him:
'Let Your plans unfold Bhagawan.
And give me the devotion, de-attachment and discrimination,
To recognize Your will
Let me be quick to follow Your command
And let me forget my fears
For You alone shall carry out Thy task
Through this body.'
Release yourself from all responsibility and simply surrender yourself in His Hands every moment of the day. He will be there!"[33]

For years I have been reading the Sri Sathya Sai Chalisa. I have found great comfort and wisdom in the simple but powerful aphorisms and have made it a part of my daily spiritual practice, together with the morning prayer to the Sun. Through these practices, it has been my wish for the Light to envelope me and to guide me.

I have reflected long on my need to be 'de-attached', and to not discriminate between individuals. After all, we are One – we are God. But, like many others, I continue to struggle with the complex dynamics of human relationships. Unfortunately, I frequently find myself feeling 'cornered', or disempowered, like I have no space to manoeuvre.

It is unsurprising then that I also have a great aversion to tight spaces. I will never go into a lift alone and would rather huff and puff my way up several flights of stairs. Even walking through double security doors at banks can put me into a state of panic.

Of course, that which we resist will persist…

And so it was, that I recently found myself being pushed into a capsular machine with barely 4cm between my nose and the machine walls. Yes, I had to undergo an MRI scan due to some health problems which doctors were struggling to diagnose. My gastroenterologist barely discussed treatment options with me and simply instructed me to get the scan done.

I arrived at the pathology lab once again feeling 'cornered', but now also weak, after the required 24-hour fast. To make matters worse, I was wrapped tightly in two layers of thick Velcro-like bandage, my arms placed above my head with a drip for a cold dye, earmuffs around my head and, for the final touch, a blanket for my shivering body. All this for someone who normally has the habit of opening all the windows in a room to ensure that she can breathe.

Just before inserting me into the capsule, a nurse handed me a panic button. I was shaking. Then the noises started. Even through the earmuffs I could still hear the sounds of sirens, drumming, and thunder. It was too much. I pressed the panic button.

The nurse, who clearly had a job to do, did her best to assuage my fears. *"Just breathe. It will only last 45 minutes,"* she said. In my mind, I pleaded with Swami: *"Why are you putting me through this?"* Eventually, I mustered up the courage to try again.

This time, as I lay there, an outstretched mummy, I began to chant Swami's name, and I visualized the Sun. A moment later, and for the first time in my life, I understood de-attachment.

I became completely focused and emotionless. My body was relaxed. I was totally calm. Swami had heard my call. He was there with me. And I felt the Light envelope my entire being.

I know now that irrespective of the 'noise' that surrounds me in my life, I can maintain my calm and be stable, if I remove my mind and keep that one-pointed focus on Swami and on the Light.

I know that whether one feels disempowered or whether one feels absolutely free, the choice is always our own. No one else can be blamed for our state of mind.

Swami put me into a tight space – to free me.

PROF. GURUVASAGIE PILLAY, 64
WESTVILLE, DURBAN

71. TRY

In September of 2000, I was graced to be in Puttaparthi for a conference in which South Africa and many other countries, were participating. It involved researching and assembling exhibits about the effects of various elements on creation as a whole. It was truly a blessing to be a part of this extraordinary conference, and many considered themselves privileged to be representing their country.

Unfortunately, my enthusiasm for the whole affair quickly waned. It was my first time alone, away from my family, and truth be told, I spent the first three weeks crying inconsolably, wanting nothing more than to go home. I felt that Swami had made a mistake in allowing me to come to Puttaparthi. So I cried, and I fought with Him. I was utterly miserable.

One day, I was assisting with the registration of conference attendees under a marquee in the boiling Puttaparthi heat. While still feeling sorry for myself, a lady walked up to me. I had absolutely no idea who she was, but she said she had been looking for me and that she had a message to give me. English not being her first language, it was a somewhat complicated discussion. But the gist of her beautiful anecdote was as follows:

"Do you know Swami is like a physiotherapist? And we are all patients who are re-learning how to walk. He stands before us and asks us to take just one step toward Him and He will hold us up. In our great fear, we beg and plead, saying that we are afraid to fall. But He continues to reassure us, telling us just to try. Finally, while taking a deep breath, we push past the fear and we lift our leg to take that first step. But, before we can even put it down, Swami lovingly and tightly embraces us to Him. We say, "But Swami, I didn't even take the step". And He, with the utmost love responds: "All you had to do was want to try".

In the past 25 years, there have been many moments that have tested my resilience, my faith and my courage. After losing my father in 1994, my mother decided, in 2008, after the grandest battle with cancer, that she too wanted to go home to her beloved Sai. I was shattered, orphaned, and fell into a darkness so deep, that I even considered taking my own life. But then I remembered… All I needed to do was want to try.

As painful as it was, as much as it felt like I was breaking, I tried… over and over… to want to take just one step. The fear was overwhelming and constant. So many times I wanted to give up. But there He was, over and over, my constant therapist, asking me to trust Him, to believe He would catch me.

At every step. Every hurdle. Every fear. Every single painful moment, He was there. Before I even took the step, He was there, to hold me, and to reassure me.

If there is one thing I have learnt, it is that with absolute faith comes absolute trust. I'm not saying that life will not have moments that will challenge us. There will be moments when our fears may become so tangible, that we lack even the propensity to believe that it will get better. But our Beloved Lord has told us so many times that life is a challenge – one that we must meet. After all I have been through, I believe this now:

My Swami, my Beloved Lord, and my Best Friend, will always be at my side.
To listen, to comfort, to be my rock, when I feel like I am falling.
He will always be as close to me as I allow myself to feel He is.
My Champion and Charioteer,
Through all of life's hurdles,
He will guide and protect me
Until it is my time
To go home.

As long as He is my therapist, I'll never stop wanting to try.

YAVESHNI NAIKER, 44
PHOENIX, DURBAN

O' worthy instruments of Sai's love! You need not be troubled. It is of course laudable that, motivated by Sai's love, you are fulfilling your duty. Still, there is no cause to be afraid.

Sai's protection is on your side and is in your heart. Do not entertain fear of any sort. Be happy.

Yours,

Baba[34]

OM SRI SAI BHAKTA JANA HRDAYA VIHARAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One whose Playground is the Hearts of Devotees

72. A PERFECT FIT

When I reflect upon my experiences with Swami, I am reminded of countless instances where I felt His Divine Presence steering me through the tribulations of life. I have been fortunate to have known Swami and to have been a part of the Sai organization since childhood. Additionally, I have had the privilege of traveling to Prashanthi Nilayam during the late 1980s and 1990s, a time when we were afforded the opportunity to be in close proximity to Swami's Physical Form. During two of those visits, I had the good fortune of being granted interviews with Swami.

The first interview was in September 1989 when I was but seven years old. I was accompanied by my parents, brother, and several other devotees from South Africa. During the interview, Swami imparted His wisdom to us in a remarkably personalized manner. At one point, He turned to me and posed His famous question: **"What do you want?"** For a few moments, I found myself at a loss for words. I was aware that Swami frequently asked this question during interviews, yet I had never truly contemplated a response. In my childhood innocence, I replied, *"I want you, Swami."* Swami appeared pleased by my answer and, with a wave of His Hand, materialized a silver pendant, which He then placed in my palm. The pendant had Swami's image on one side and the Aum symbol on the reverse. I can still vividly remember the heat that radiated from the pendant as Swami placed it in my hand, so much so that others hurriedly passed me tissues to hold it with. Shortly thereafter, He turned to my brother and posed the same question to him, smiling as He inquired, **"Do you want the same as your brother?"** Swami then materialized the identical pendant for my brother.

Seven years later, we embarked on another journey to Prashanthi. During this trip, Swami called the South African youth for an interview. By now I was 14 years old, but still the youngest member of the group. During this interview, Swami addressed matters pertinent to young adults. He spoke extensively about relationships and education, urging us to dedicate ourselves to our studies. He seemed pleased with youth who were pursuing post-secondary studies and those who, while working, continued to pursue their education part-time. He counseled us to remain faithful in romantic relationships, advising us against playing **"musical chairs"** when it came to matters of the heart. Swami spoke to each of us in turn, and believe me, there is nothing we can conceal from Him. He possesses knowledge about us that no one else does.

When my turn finally arrived, the first observation He made was regarding my eyesight. I have battled with severe farsightedness and astigmatism for most of my life, having to wear corrective eyewear since the age of 4. Swami reassured me that He was aware of my health issues and commented that my left eye was weaker than my right — an insight known only to myself and my optometrist.

Swami then proceeded to tell me in a stern tone that He was not happy with my school results. To provide context, I had thought that I was performing very well academically and was one of the top students in my grade at the time. Surely, Swami must have erred...wrong! I have come to realise that Swami has a divine plan for each of us, and His plan for me was that I pursue a career in medicine and serve Him through my work as a doctor. Even at the age of 14, and as good as my grades were by normal standards, Swami knew that I needed to improve in order to gain admission to medical school. From that day on, I dedicated myself more to my studies and, by His Grace, was able to improve my grades further, which I believe helped me to gain acceptance to the medical school of my choice (or rather, of His choice).

Swami then remarked on my **"monkey mind"** encouraging me to exert greater control over my thoughts. After all the admonishments, Swami sweetly inquired, **"What do you want?"** This time, I replied, *"Nothing."* While my answer may have seemed peculiar to the others present, it was one which I knew Swami would understand.

Seven years prior, during my first interview, I had expressed, *"Swami, I want you."* If I had Swami, I possessed everything; thus, there was nothing further I desired. Swami smiled and materialized a green, emerald ring and placed it upon my finger, before remarking, **"Perfect fit. Not even a jeweler could create a better fit."** Indeed, the ring has remained a perfect fit for nearly 30 years (and those who know me can attest to how much my weight has fluctuated over the years!)

We are indeed profoundly fortunate to have been born in an era when the Divine Presence of God graced this earth. Each of us possesses a unique role in Swami's sacred mission. Let us eternally bear in mind Swami's profound words: Once we surrender our hearts and minds to God entirely, He will tend to our needs in every conceivable manner.

DR THEVESHEN PADAYACHEE, 43
NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

73. THE GURU WITHIN

As a child, I was constantly searching for God. When I was 15, I read a fairytale about the 'Bird of Truth' which left a deep impression on me. I felt that I too was searching for Truth. I studied fine art and, in 1971, married my life partner David. Together, we embarked on a spiritual adventure to find the Guru within. Dave and I learned how to meditate, and we practiced yoga asanas and pranayama breathing techniques.

In 1974, Dave and I decided to go overseas to train as teachers of meditation. For six months, we worked in the kitchens in Switzerland cooking for 150 meditation teachers, in exchange for which, we were able to attend the lectures ourselves, for free. Included in our spiritual studies was Vedanta, which amongst other things, explores the concepts of Maya (illusion), Brahman (the ultimate reality), Atman (the individual self) as well as knowledge of the seven states of consciousness. Our days were filled with deep meditation and study. What a truly amazing experience it was! After coming back home, and for the next 20 years, I began teaching, while being a mother to the three wonderful sons I was blessed to have.

Then, one pivotal day in 1994, as I walked up the stairs to consult with an Ayurvedic doctor, I came face-to-face with my first picture of Swami. Something profound happened within me, and I began to shake. When I asked the receptionist who the man in the picture was, she told me this was Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and that I could find more information about Him in the bookshop downstairs. After my consult, I went straight to the bookshop and bought my first amazing book, "Sai Baba - Invitation to Glory" by Howard Murphet. And once I had read it, I knew I had waited my whole life for this pivotal moment - when I found my Bird of Truth, my Sathya.

A year later, Dave needed urgent open-heart surgery to replace a defective mitral valve with a Saint Jude mechanical valve. The day before his operation, I was invited by friends to accompany them to a little holy house in Grasmere Road, Chatsworth. When we were inside the prayer room, there was a loud crashing sound, followed by lots of sweets which fell around us. The 'Aunty' of the home drew my attention to a large sugar crystal that had fallen at my feet. She told me that Sai Baba had just given me a blessing. When I told her about Dave's imminent surgery, she sent me away with instructions and an apothecary of blessed fruit, vibhuti, and holy milk, oil and water. That evening, I relayed the miracle to Dave and asked him to partake of these blessings. Dave had absolutely no fear, the operation was a success, and the mechanical valve continues, even today, to work perfectly well.

In the year 2000, Dave gave me a special gift of a millennium watch. One day, after running some errands in Durban and Umhlanga, I was shocked to notice, after completing my last task, that my watch was missing. I retraced my steps but could not find the watch anywhere. As I drove back to work in Kloof, I said a prayer to Swami that, if this was my karma, then I would gracefully accept the loss. But how I wished I had my watch back… When I finally got back to the office, I went to open the boot of the car, and there… to my absolute amazement… was my watch… lying face up along the back bumper of the car! I was totally overwhelmed with emotion at the enormity of what had just happened. There was no way that I could have travelled such a distance with the watch lying on the back bumper. I flew up the stairs to tell Dave what had happened. He looked at me, very intently, and said, *"Helen, if this is what happened, you had better take this Great Being very seriously."*

Most of our holidays were spent camping in nature with our three sons. And naturally, Swami always came with us. On one occasion, we travelled to Kosi Bay in northern KwaZulu-Natal in our vehicle Sai Gita. Samuel Sandweiss, through "The Holy Man & the Psychiatrist" also joined us, and I was most intrigued by his explanation of the monkey mind. During the holiday however, I found my own monkey mind to be really annoying, and I asked Swami for His help. Then, as I looked up, I saw a large green snake directly above my head. Well, I was so shocked that I took flight, and left my monkey mind well behind! It was definitely a very clear message from Swami. The repetition of Swami's Divine Name is the answer to all our concerns. Over the years, Swami has appeared to me in many dreams. In one of those dreams, Swami gave me a mantra to use any time I felt under threat - **"Om Shri Sathya Sai Brahmane Namah."** This mantra is always with me. Swami is Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, the Guru within.

As soon as my sons were in high school, I began studying alternative healing modalities, including reflexology, ayurvedic massage, and energy healing. In 2005, I was given an amazing opportunity by a Sai devotee friend to purchase a SCIO machine and become a SCIO practitioner. SCIO stands for Scientific Consciousness Interface Operation, and it uses bio-feedback and bio-resonance to identify areas of stress and imbalance in the body, so that these can be corrected, and self-healing promoted. When every cell of our body contains the memory of perfect wholeness, it is stress which is the main cause of all dis-ease. I work with both humans and animals, and I am truly grateful for Swami's Guidance during every therapy session. I hope to always be His instrument of love, kindness and compassion.

Shortly after beginning my SCIO practice, I suffered a fall. An x-ray taken in the casualty ward found a fracture of the scaphoid bone in my right wrist. My arm was put in a plaster cast, and I was told that it would take 10 weeks for the bone to heal. How was I going to work? I prayed to Swami about it, but I also said that if this was my karma, then I accept it. That night, I had a dream in which I was meditating with a crowd of devotees in a beautiful field. My body began to shake, and the people around had to hold me down. Later, I was shown a picture of myself in a tube of orange light. In the morning when I awoke, I told Dave about the dream, and that I was certain Swami had healed the fracture. About a week later, I consulted an orthopaedic surgeon for a second opinion. He confirmed that my x-ray had indicated a fracture. However, he sent me for a follow-up x-ray which, by contrast, showed no sign of fracture at all! I required no further treatment and could resume my work immediately, without hindrance. This miracle was through nothing else but the Grace of our Swami.

In 2022, Dave suffered a stroke. We were living in Underberg at the time, and it took hours for the local ambulance service to drive him to the Mediclinic in Pietermaritzburg. I followed in our car and found him in the casualty ward, waiting to see a neurologist. When Dave was finally admitted to the ICU, it was dark, I was exhausted, and I did not know where to go. I left the hospital sobbing, and I called out to Swami for help. As I drove up to a Stop-sign, I saw a hotel on the corner called the Regal Inn. I went in to enquire about accommodation, but the receptionist told me they were full. Then, after disappearing for a few minutes, he came back to tell me I could stay in room 27, which was significant to me as I have always been drawn to the

divine number 9! The next morning, I called family and close friends to tell them about Dave. Shortly thereafter, I received a call to tell me that Swami had 'taken care of everything'. The hotel was owned by Sai devotees, and I could stay for as long as I needed to. For me, it was an absolute miracle how Swami had arranged everything.

After the stroke, Dave and I realised that we had no choice but to sell our house in Underberg, where we were so isolated, and to move closer to hospitals, family and friends. Sobbing, I called out again for Swami's help. A few days later, a property agent called to ask if we would consider selling our house as she had a potential buyer. When the buyer came to view our house, we received an offer to purchase on the very same day! Yet again, Swami had answered our prayers and organized all the details.

In writing these words, I realise that Swami is, and has always been, my Guiding Light. We never have to fear, as He is always near. He is the Guru within.

Thank You Swami, for my divine purpose, unfolding in a perfect way, for the highest and greatest good, of all. Jai Sai Ram.

HELEN, 78
GILLITS, DURBAN

Dear

Good thoughts, good deeds, always yield good fruits; prayers are always answered; that is the rule.

The Guru need not always come in actual concrete form; he can prompt the higher impulses and urges through a friend or a book or an event which reveals the reality in a flash. After this awakening, the rest is mostly in the hands of the aspirant. The Guru can, at best, watch and guide. Do not get agitated or lose heart. You will be guided, however far you may be geographically.

I am as near you, as you are near me. Be steady dear... in your Sadhana, and you can certainly attain Shanthi.

With Blessings
Sri Sathya Sai Baba[35]

OM SRI SAI SARVAJNAAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is Omniscient

74. CONVERSATIONS WITH MY CREATOR

As a Sai aspirant, I used to strive to pursue lofty ideals of what I considered 'greatness in godliness'. Often falling short, as it was unrealistic - a mostly unattainable goal for a fallible human distracted by battlefields both internally and externally - I took some time to think about what transformation meant for me and how I could make slow, steady, sustainable progress. I turned to Swami's practical messages and leelas which are the foundations for the spiritual transformation that we seek. The three recollections of Swami's leelas that follow, serve as reminders of Swami's Omnipotence and just how He is an ever willing Hrudhaya Nivasi for His children.

On one occasion I grew quite agitated from not quite understanding (or accepting) why Swami had manifested vibhuti in our home. While speaking to Him one day, I declared that I had no need for Him to prove Himself to me in this way, as I was confident in our relationship. I added more in jest than anything else, that if He really wanted to gift something precious to me, rather than vibhuti (because I had three full yellow Prashanthi packets in my altar drawer), I would prefer amrit, a craving that began in my childhood. When my grandmother visited Shirdi, she had brought a wee bit back in a tiny camera film roll case. That meagre amount was shared amongst so many family members that 'ration' would be too generous a description - it was more like a hint of a taste, not even an entire drop. The memory of that precious fragranced nectar of the Gods had remained with me over the years, in the hope that one day I would visit Shirdi and receive amrit of my very own. I didn't mention this conversation with my Creator to anyone, for fear of judgement. But the following morning, my partner found the amrit in our murthi tray - a generous 2-3 tablespoons. Needless to say, I was overjoyed that my Lord Sai had graciously fulfilled my yearning, and I didn't even need to leave home to relish it.

This incident concretised that Swami was truly omnipresent. He is the Lord of the Universe -macrocosm, microcosm, and everything in between. He created my neurons, witnessed my neural pathways, filled the space between my synapses, and so lovingly indulged my request as an elder would give a sweet treat to a child. There is nothing in this world or beyond that Swami is unaware of. He alone observes our every thought, breath and emotion - with infinite love and compassion. As we undertake His call to WATCH ourselves (Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character, Heart), we should remember that as a mother encourages her child to crawl, then walk - our Divine Mother Sai is encouraging us to experience Divinity in life. Rely upon, depend on and call out to Mother Sai at every turn - Omnipresent Swami will never fail to answer a prayer and shower unconditional love.

The second recollection is of a Thursday morning when I was tidying up my altar ahead of prayer - the usual removal of incense ash and freshening and/or replacing the flowers adorning the murthis. On seeing that the flowers appeared a tad more tired than I liked, I apologised to Swami, saying I would replace the flowers as soon as was possible. I playfully remarked that if 'Ceiling on Desires' were the order of the day, perhaps Swami would be happy to wait a day or two. Then, I cheekily questioned if He needed a new flower at all or would a simple prayer, offered with love, suffice? I left the room to refill His vessel with water and upon returning, I found vibhuti on the old, unchanged flower. I had received my answer!

Swami needs neither simple nor elaborate offerings (flowers, prasadam), or other external shows of worship. As the Omniscient Divine, He knows our hearts, minds and the intentions behind our worship. There is nothing material that we can offer that our all-knowing Lord requires, other than our hearts and minds filled with goodness, and tuning in to Godliness in every moment. Let's practise His message of Ceiling on Desires, simplify our external worship and develop significance in our personal transformation journeys. Swami is ready to embrace us with loving arms, open wide.

My final recollection is that of a photo of Swami holding the Hiranyagarbha Lingam that is associated with healing. Being in a rush one day, I placed it on my dresser and didn't think anything of it for a couple of days. Then, one afternoon I noticed it was covered in vibhuti. That very same afternoon, we received a call about a relative who had taken ill. There was a compelling feeling from within that this photo was meant for them. But my ego reared its sneaky head and negative thoughts ('*This is my photo*' and '*These miracles are meant for me*') began to circle like vultures to carrion. I chose to rise above those thoughts - to deny the manipulation and self-importance that ego attempted to feed me. Remembering Swami, His Infinite Love and just how much Grace He has shown me, I carefully packaged the photo and sent it to the patient. I immediately felt all the lighter that I had listened to my heart. Lo and behold, the next morning, I discovered that Swami had sprinkled vibhuti on His photo on my kitchen windowsill - a spot where I could have full and frequent view of His Grace.

We are drops of the Divine Ocean, traversing the waves of life, all equal, all with the spark of divinity within, none more or less than our fellow travellers. Swami's love is unconditional. To feel it fully, we must both receive and give it. We must become instruments for divine, uplifting, healing and energising love flowing from Him, to and through us, into our homes, communities and the world at large. After all, He assured us that we are His Premaswarupalara, Embodiments of Love.

Share the blessings of life, whether through charity, knowledge, kindness or prayer, no matter the form or size, any offering imbued with love becomes divine.

That simple gesture is the all-important act of taking one step towards our dear Swami. And we know what happens as a result - He takes 100 towards us!

ANONYMOUS, 48
UK

75. ON THE ROAD WITH SAI

We were travelling home from a holiday in Gauteng back to Durban, when I heard an unusual sound emanating from the engine of our Ford Escort. It was about 11h00 and at this point in our journey, we were approaching the town of Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal, which was still a distance from home. I did not want to alarm the family, so I prayed silently to Swami to please take us home safely. When we arrived in Ladysmith, I drove to a petrol station where I parked off to the side. I opened the bonnet of the car to search for the source of the noise, only to discover that the bolt which holds the alternator in place was missing a nut, and that this had caused the fan belt to become loose. I prayed to Swami to help me resolve this issue. While walking around the garage, I continued to chant *"Aum Sai Ram"*, as I tried to figure out what to do next. Then I spotted it…

The grass surrounding the petrol station looked like it had been freshly cut, so the charcoal grey nut stood out against the green grass strands. As I bent down to pick it up, I noticed it was still quite greasy, which meant it hadn't been there for long to have been weathered by wind or rain. With the nut in my hand, I was about to turn back to the car, when I spotted a ragged piece of cloth also lying 'aimlessly' on the grass. I was now well-armed for the required repair job.

I returned to our car where my family was still sitting, waiting patiently and wondering what I was up to. I used the newly acquired rag to clean the nut and, just before I could place it onto the bolt, I chanted "*Aum Sai Ram*" once again. The nut fitted into the bolt perfectly! Using the tools I usually carry in my car, I managed to

adjust the fan belt to the required tension. I then started the engine, once again while chanting *"Aum Sai Ram"*, and was utterly relieved to find that the noise had vanished. From the depths of my heart, and in the quiet of my mind, I thanked Swami for His assistance, which made it possible for us to continue our journey home without any further problems.

One may ask how it is possible to find the right fitting nut in a random petrol station garden hundreds of kilometres away from home? Well, Swami is omnipresent and omniscient. He knows everything about the entire universe. It's been said that not a blade of grass moves without Him willing it. Perhaps I can be permitted to paraphrase it: *Not a single nut rolls without Him greasing it!*

When challenges beset us, it can sometimes be difficult to rise above them. But this is when we most need to remember Swami's advice to us: **Life is a game - play it!**

I am ever grateful to Swami for His help throughout my life.

MORGAN GOVENDER, 76
PARLOCK, DURBAN

76. GROWING UP WITH SAI

Having been born and raised in the Sai fold, Swami has always played an integral role in my life. Naturally, with growing up, one is always challenged by the maya of the world, which at times led me to question my faith and beliefs. But Swami, in His own subtle way, has always shown His Omnipresence and Love in my life.

I have been privileged to visit Prashanthi Nilayam on three occasions, each one presenting an interaction or message intended for me by our beloved Sai.

My first visit to the ashram saw me turn 8 years old. As it was my birthday, I took a tray of sweets with me to darshan, which was allowed at the time. Imagine my excitement when I was blessed to be in the first row! As Swami gracefully glided through the devotees, He stopped in front of me, took the sweets and then proceeded to throw the sweets into the crowd as prasad. My dad, next to whom I was seated, also took the opportunity to take padanamaskar. This was my first encounter with the Divine in Physical Form.

When I turned 21, I was gifted with visiting Prashanthi again. By now, Swami was 'confined' to the wheelchair but still blessed us with daily darshans. Every day for the two weeks of our stay, I carried with me a letter I had written to Swami. But no matter how hard I prayed, Swami would always take a route through the crowd that was opposite from where I sat. On the last day, and the very last darshan, I carried my letters again, hoping for one last try. That day, I got the third row, and Swami actually came past me. But, as was becoming typical of our relationship, He looked in the opposite direction as He passed. In my mind, I pleaded with Him to please take my letter, as I was about to leave. Swami then suddenly stopped. And then I saw Him instruct a sevadal to collect letters from devotees seated in my area. And what do you know?! My letter was collected with all the rest and handed over to Swami. This was a mind-blowing experience for me, confirming that Swami knows our every thought and feeling.

My last visit to the ashram was a never-to-be-forgotten experience in December 2008. I had the privilege to be part of the Christmas Choir. Each practice session was filled with a spiritual lesson of some kind for me. Then

the day arrived to perform in Swami's presence. I was seated with a clear view of Swami throughout the entire presentation. Not only did Swami stay till the very end, but He even asked us to continue singing after we had completed our song list. The love He emanated was intense and filled my soul that day.

Yet, I felt deep inside that there was a message to be understood through those feelings. Once again, on my last day at the ashram and at my last darshan, Swami passed by where I was sitting. But this time, there was no interaction of any kind. All I saw was the back of our Lord as He moved further and further away.

It was only a few years later, when Swami took Maha Samadhi, that I realised He was actually preparing me to detach from His Physical Form and to find Him within. Since then, I have not had the same urge to visit the ashram. Rather, I feel a sense of contentment, that Swami is in fact within me, around me, below me, and all around me.

ANONYMOUS, 41
PRETORIA

Baba is the Indweller in every being. He is present everywhere, so nothing is hidden from Him. Baba's knowledge knows no limit.

He is the inner Guide and Teacher of all. He is the ultimate resource and relief for all.[36]

OM SRI SAI APAD BANDHAVAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is a Saviour in times of Calamity

77. LIFE AND DEATH ARE BUT A SINGLE BREATH APART

This life, a tapestry woven with both pain and grace, stands as a living testament to Bhagawan's infinite mercy. At the age of 22, life brought me face-to-face with mortality- the body shattered, yet the spirit preserved by His unseen hand. Adversity became my greatest teacher, awakening within me the resilience to rise, to trust, and to surrender completely to the Divine Will.

The journey began with a series of dreams, each one a gentle nudge from my Beloved Swami to His Divine Abode. The longing to see Him in His Physical Form consumed my heart and every Rand earned as an intern designer was set aside for this sacred pilgrimage. In June 2006, I journeyed alone to Puttaparthi. There, amidst the fragrant breeze and the whispers of the divine, I experienced Swami's mystical presence in countless ways, all signs of His unseen hand cradling my soul. What I did not realise then was that this journey was but a preparation, a fortification of faith for the trials that lay ahead.

The night of 27th September 2006 was one that would forever alter the course of my life. A special stirring filled the air, prompting me to dress up for my Beloved Bhagawan, not knowing that my soul had an inkling of the shifting winds of fate. Two Sai brothers, my sister and I, were on our way to attend a bhajan gathering. But we never made it… Twilight skies... A deafening crash.... Silence... Darkness...

Between the veils of semi-consciousness, I glanced at my mangled legs. In the hospital, and unable to comprehend the gravity of the moment, I faintly asked my mother, *"What happened?"* The physical world bore witness to what my soul and mind had not fully registered — a head-on collision with a tow truck. Anashan Bhai, my brother in faith, had succumbed to his injuries. My own body lay broken with bilateral femur fractures, a dislocated knee, a hanging ankle, lung contusion, and a degloving head injury. Every medical assessment echoed the same verdict, I should not have survived.

Yet, the unseen hand of Bhagawan had already written a different destiny. On 29 September 2006 a team of surgeons at King Edward Hospital embarked on an eleven-hour marathon operation. They repaired both my shattered femurs with 6mm steel rods from knees to hip, realigned my knee, placed external steel fixators on my right ankle, stitched my scalp and reconstructed my eyelid through plastic surgery. Nine pints of blood were transfused into this lifeless body. They lost me three times on the operating table as I watched from above, as the doctors worked tirelessly on this body. One surgeon in particular refused to give up - he resuscitated me and placed me on a ventilator before transferring me to City Hospital.

In that subliminal space between life and death, Bhagawan revealed: Life and Death are but a single breath apart – the breath of the Divine, the unseen Prana that sustains all. Suspended between this world and the next, my body lay in a comatose state. Yet, my soul wandered through realms unknown- places of torment where beings seemed to feed off the love energy that radiates from every soul. I first described these as Tibetan beings or dragons and I fought with all my might, arms lifting in defence at a soul level, even as my Physical Form would react and really puzzle the doctors.

In those darkest hours, one bhajan became my lifeline: *Prabhujee Daya Karo, Mana me aan baaso (Lord, have mercy on me. Come reside in my heart.)* Guardian angels, my late brother Sharman and Aneshan Bhai appeared in that realm, both cloaked in white, guiding me out of the twilight shadows. Then, I saw the Light — brilliant, boundless, all-encompassing vastness, most peaceful, pure Bliss. And Bhagawan stood before me,with a silent command echoing through my consciousness: **"Go back child. It is not your time."**

On Vijayadasami, the day of victory which concludes Navarathri, I opened my eyes. The nurse asked me to blink three times if I wanted water. Sai, the Indweller, the Antaryami, blinked for me. He removed the ventilator mouthpiece, and my first sip of water after two weeks tasted like amrith itself. Years later, I learned that this was the day my ventilator was scheduled to be removed regardless of the outcome.

What followed was a slow, excruciating awakening, and moving from one hospital to the next. X-rays revealed that the bones had begun to mesh at an astounding rate within the comatose state I had been in. But my right ankle with its open wound and exposed bone, seemed irreparable. Infection set in, and pain became my constant companion - a relentless teacher shaping the soul.

I begged to return to Swami, to go back into the Peace, the Light, the Bliss. But through the agony, my mother's voice anchored me: *"As long as there is pain, there is life. And where there is life, there is hope and healing."* She called it a healing pain, a phrase that remains a mantra even today. The Hanuman Chalisa echoed through the hospital corridors daily, with my parents' recitations infusing my lifeless limbs with divine energy.

After enduring another operation - a skin graft to cover the ankle – I began to train my arms with the aid of a set of 1.3kg dumbbells, not merely to regain strength, but to prepare for the unknown purpose He had willed for me. My muscles were so weak that my arms would just fall to the side. So I had to use my mind to steer me, and to motivate myself to keep my arms straight during the rehabilitation sessions, and to envision walking without a limp, with faith that Swami would heal every cell, every nerve and every ligament in this body. On 31 October, I sat up on a chair for the first time, by manoeuvring my upper body off the hospital bed, and carrying myself onto the seat using monkey chains. My feet touched the floor, one foot feeling the icy floor beneath, and the other foot feeling nothing.

I felt a strong need to be discharged from the hospital in time to attend Bhagawan's birthday celebration. But I was still unable to weight-bear on both my legs. So for two weeks, my parents would carry me, in their arms or in a wheelchair, or I would use my arms to push myself around, even on the floor. But I made it to Swami's birthday celebrations, sitting in my wheelchair and watching as my Sai sisters danced at the Newlands Sai Centre in awe-inspiring splendour. That night, my right knee, which could not move, and which had no feeling, began to tremble and shake uncontrollably.

By His Grace, through the power of collective prayer by all my Sai brothers and sisters, and through the unwavering faith of my beloved mother and father who became the cradle of my strength, I learned to walk with aid within three months of the accident, returning to work on 7 January 2007. To all, I offer my undying gratitude. In June 2007, I returned to Prashanthi Nilayam walking with both my legs and no walking aids, not merely to thank Bhagawan for saving my life, but to offer this life at His feet.

<u>The Grace That Moved Within</u>
Where doctors predicted paralysis, Swami willed life.
Where pain threatened to break me, Swami infused strength.
Where numbness lingered, Swami's name stirred divine vibrations within.
Every scar etched upon this body is a sacred reminder, not of suffering, but of divine intervention.
Each step I take is not of my own strength, but of His Grace working through me.
I was not brought back merely to survive - but to be the light.
To serve.
To inspire.
To ignite the flame of Bhakti in every heart that crosses my path.

LESHNA SAIKOOLAL, 41
MIDRAND, GAUTENG

78. ADVANCED LIFE SUPPORT OF THE DIVINE KIND

A wise woman once told me: *"You don't have to go looking for Swami. He will come to you when the time is right."* Come to me He did, in my twenties when I married into a good family. Every pendant, every picture, every bhajan and every story I heard of Sri Sathya Sai Baba from my new family, resonated with me. I was attracted by His philosophy and His teachings of **"Help Ever- Hurt Never"** and **"Hands that Help are Holier than Lips that Pray"** - all of which made me see the world differently. I experienced many little miracles that reinforced my belief in His great teachings. Since then, my thirst to know Him and His legacy has been quenchless.

Perhaps the greatest testimony of Swami's presence in my life occurred on 17 October 2005. It was the end of Purtassi and the day started like any other, with everyone embracing the morning rush and departing for work and university. Around 09h00 that morning, I got a call from my cousin informing me that our daughters, who were students at the University of KwaZulu Natal, were in 'a little accident' - a motor vehicle accident! Putting the phone down, I frantically contacted my husband, who had also just received the call from my cousin. As we made our way to the accident scene on Annet Drive, Reservoir Hills, my heart stopped when an "Advanced Life Support" emergency vehicle passed us on Mountbatten Drive, evidently also on its way to the accident.

The adrenalin rushed, and the questions bombarded my poor husband: why did our daughter not call us herself; what were they doing on Annet drive when they were supposed to have been at lectures? My husband, who I am sure was navigating a quiet storm himself, reassured me that all would be fine. But when we got to the scene of the accident, I could not believe my eyes. My knees turned to jelly at the sight of the mangled wreck. The familiar black VW Citi Golf was lying on its head on the side of the road. A huge crowd had already gathered…

Fortunately, all three girls had been successfully extracted from the car. The driver and the front passenger did not suffer any severe injuries as they had worn their seat belts. Sadly, my daughter was not so fortunate, as she was the back seat passenger without her seat belt on. The driver relayed that she had tried to avoid a speeding car on the windy Annet Drive. In doing so, the Citi Golf unfortunately clipped a rocky outcrop on the road and somersaulted. The back seat had moved up on impact and wedged my daughter in the car, causing her severe injuries. The girls explained that they had a gap in lectures and needed to fetch a book from one of their homes in Reservoir Hills. There was no need to probe any further; all that mattered was that our children's lives were spared.

My daughter sustained multiple fractures to her spine, a concussion, and bruising to her lungs. It was a miracle she survived the accident. Whilst I gathered my wits about me, my husband made his way to our child and, to his relief, found that she was conscious. When I got to her, she simply looked up at me and whispered, *"I'm sorry."* I did my best to assure my baby that she was going to be fine. But the paramedics had already established that her injuries were so severe, she had to be transported with extreme care to the hospital.

While my daughter was being loaded into the Advanced Life Support Vehicle, a woman came up to my husband and I and asked if we were the parents. She wore a peach Punjabi and identified herself as 'Rakhee.' She said she had been with my daughter all the while. Then she scribbled her phone number on a piece of paper and asked us to keep her informed about my daughter's progress.

My daughter spent eighteen days at St Augustine's hospital, thirteen of which were in the ICU. Six days after the accident, a spinal fusion was performed on her by a team of doctors which included an orthopaedic and cardio-thoracic surgeon. After the delicate four-hour surgery, one of the surgeons commented that there was someone sitting on my daughter's shoulder through the procedure. *"Go to the temple and offer your thanks,"* he said.

My daughter had to take six months off university because she had a rod in her spine and had to wear a body brace. After six months, she underwent another surgery to remove the rod. According to her surgeon, our daughter's outcome was one to be extremely happy about, as many patients still suffer some form of permanent incapacity. Our daughter went back to university and back to her part time job at a jewellery store which was kindly held for her until she returned. On the day of her graduation in 2009, I became very emotional as I watched her walk across the stage to be capped, in her ivory saree, long well-coiffed hair and graduation gown. I caught myself looking around the auditorium… for Rakhee…

… We had tried many times to reach Rakhee, but without success. When we asked around if anyone knew her, our efforts drew blanks. When our daughter herself had no memory of Rakhee, we eventually let it go and focused instead on her recovery and healing process. But there was no doubt in our minds about the Divine Presence.

We are just extremely grateful that our eighteen year old girl walked away with her life. Throughout that harrowing period, there was a Divine Force that lifted and guided us. Regardless of the form it took, to me, that force was Swami, and the peace I feel knowing that He guides me daily, is priceless.

"To live in the hearts you leave behind is not to die."
Thomas Campbell

For as long as I live, Swami will live in my heart.

NAVA NAIDOO, 62
PARLOCK, DURBAN

79. A LIFE-DEFINING ACCIDENT AND A LIFE-REFINING RELATIONSHIP

During my college years 1971 - 1973 I used to attend Sai services in Clairwood where the bhajans and black and white movies of Sai Baba had caught my interest. The energy that enveloped my being after bhajans ensured that I did not miss those weekly satsangs.

On 28th January 1976, I was involved in an accident that was to define my path. My brother had taken my car and my parents on an outing. A short while later my uncle arrived at home, and I jumped into his vehicle to run an errand. Imagine our surprise when we saw my brother and my mum and dad standing at the roadside next to a punctured tyre (these were the days before cellphones, and even before landlines for every home). Needless to say, I got out to help them change the tyre. As I went to the back of the vehicle to replace the punctured wheel with the spare, another car drove straight into me.

All I remember is waking up one month later in King Edward Hospital, where I spent a total of three months recovering from the injuries sustained. These included 12 fractures, 6 cracked ribs, a dislocated hip, a degloved kneecap, scalded feet, and a right leg which was ultimately left 3,5cm shorter. After three more months at home in recovery, I was terminated from my teaching position on medical grounds by the Department of Education.

Despite my disabilities, I was undeterred. I had only been married for a year, so I chose to use the time to complete my B.A degree. Most importantly, my faith did not waver and I continued attending Sai services where I was drawn to singing bhajans. It was almost as if an external force was prodding me along, and I even helped set up the Verulam Sai Centre in 1978.

In 1981, I was able to travel to Puttaparthi where we had the good fortune of being called in for an interview with Swami together with other South Africans. As I was sitting in the middle of the group, the late Mr. CR Singh told Swami that I had lost my job, to which Swami responded: **"Go home and don't worry."** He told me He would give me something for my injuries and then He materialised vibhuthi which He also gave to my wife, Bimla.

Swami's words had puzzled me, especially the "go home" part. However, in January 1982, when I found myself being appointed back into the teaching profession, I began to understand its significance (especially when I later learned that the government does not usually reappoint employees who have been medically boarded).

My involvement in the Sai organization then took off with great enthusiasm, and I returned to Puttaparthi in 1990 for the World Conference. Once again, I was blessed with an interview but this time, I found myself sitting right in the front, with my right leg sticking out because my knee could not bend. Swami lovingly asked me to get up and sit on the sofa next to Him. As He spoke to us about our issues, He would pat my right hand – I think it was more than 10 times. He said: **"Don't worry, be happy."** I felt like I was in heaven, seated there right next to the Lord Himself.

On two occasions during the interview, even as He spoke to others, he pointed His finger at me and said: **"You call Me in any name and form, I will respond."** Then, **"Don't worry. It was a matter of life and death. I had to save you."** He knew exactly what was running through my mind and was responding to it! In turn, I said that I was worried about my sister who had cancer at the time. He then pointed toward the wall and said, **"See, she is praying. Ask her to continue."** When I got back to South Africa, Swami's words were confirmed to me:

- At that moment during the interview, my sister back in SA had been plucking flowers to pray!

- My older brother who had accompanied me to the trauma unit following the accident said that, as he held me down in the stretcher, I had screamed out in my semi-conscious state, *"Sai Baba, what are you doing to me?"* This proved that Swami had saved me regardless of the way I called out to him.

- I was also reminded that during my time in hospital, my principal who was a nun and another teacher from the Roman Catholic school at which I taught, used to come and pray at my bedside. Further proving to me that He responds to any name and form.

That interview, my close physical proximity and contact with Him, and the vibuthi He distributed to us, all served to mould and energize me for higher levels of work in the organisation. For example, in 1993, we were offered the opportunity to do seva in the community of Mahlankala in Richards Bay in the form of a school building project. I was entrusted with leading the building of a six classroom school. We worked tirelessly over 18 months with energy and enthusiasm to complete the project. Through it, I learnt that Swami will support

you to take on any role, as long as you accept the duty with faith. Although I was an ordinary, disabled teacher, I found myself not only instructing experienced building foremen but also demonstrating to our sevadals how to tip mixed concrete from a wheelbarrow for the foundation. Under normal circumstances, with my lack of construction knowledge and my disabled hip and knee, this would just not have been possible. I firmly believe Swami is your Driver if you want Him to be.

To complete my story, in 2010, I consulted an orthopaedic specialist, an Afrikaans doctor, in South Africa, after enduring many years of pain. He could not believe that I was still walking and said: *"Your hips and knees are finished!"* I told him that I would pray to my spiritual master for Him to work through his hands and fix me.

Following two surgeries, including a knee replacement, the reduced length of my right leg was decreased from 3,5cm to 0,5cm. I humbly thanked the non-believing surgeon who grew very uncomfortable at my attempt to bow down at his feet. But after my final consult with him, his assistant told me that my case had left a very big impact on the doctor, to the point that he would refer to me as a 'miracle'.

It took 34 years between the accident and my eventual hip replacement, demonstrating to me that transformation does not take place overnight. It happens very slowly. But Swami will always take care of everything...

Like the time we were attacked in our home in Verulam in 2017 by five men with guns. I screamed out: *"Baba! Baba!"* and instinctively put up my palms so that they faced my attackers, much like Swami's Abhaya Hastha Pose. I could hear the click of at least two guns, but no bullets were fired. At first, I thought they were using toy guns, but we later found the loaded magazine with 9mm bullets on the floor. I believe that Swami responded to my call yet again and neutralised the guns.

Swami has saved my life more than once. So I make it my duty to take care of this body as best I can. I go to the gym four times a week and I swim twenty laps. We must never forget that every day is a miracle if we wake up.

JAIBARATH SINGH, 75
VERULAM, DURBAN

80. TEARS OF AMRIT

Like most women, I have cried both tears of joy and sorrow in my life. I have learned that in order to survive those pendulum-like swings, one needs to be fastened to a central mast. For me, that mast came to be Swami.

He came into my life shortly after the birth of our youngest child in 1982. I was sitting in our lounge, cuddling my one-month-old baby, who was suffering from a cold, while my husband Krish chatted to our broker. All of a sudden, I noticed that my baby's body had stiffened. He became very rigid and appeared to have stopped breathing. Panic and fear struck both my husband and I, and we were at a loss as to what to do. Was our baby having a seizure? Why was he not breathing? We didn't know what was happening to him, but something was definitely very wrong. Fortunately, our broker had the presence of mind to get us into the car and take us to the local hospital in Isipingo. But the 15 minutes that it took for us to get there, was the most nerve-wracking of my life. As I held on to my precious baby, I found myself screaming out to Sai Baba, a Being I knew nothing about, except for the occasional story about His wonderous miracles. *"Sai Baba! Sai Baba! Please help my child,"* I screamed, all the way until we reached the emergency rooms. No sooner did we rush through the doors and call for a doctor, than our baby started to breathe again! By the time the doctor arrived, he had regained consciousness fully, and nothing appeared to be wrong. The doctor was very puzzled by the symptoms we

described, and he could find no sign of any trauma. My child never suffered a seizure-like episode again, but that episode marked the beginning of our journey to Sai Baba. He was an unknown Being to me, but one powerful enough to have heard my desperate cries and come to my baby's rescue.

Fast forward seven years, and Sai Baba had become the central mast of our lives, with Krish and I and our three children actively involved in the Isipingo Sai centre. One school holiday, while our family was holidaying in Mauritius, we requested Krish's brother-in-law to house-sit for us. Unfortunately, he became ill and had to be rushed to hospital where sadly, he passed away. It was a big shock to our family. But, during that period, Swami soothed our grief in the most unusual way.

I had a beautiful glass prayer stand which I was particularly proud of. On the top stood Swami's photo and at the bottom was His padam. One morning during the funeral period, as I stood praying, I noticed something strange about Swami's photo. He appeared to be crying, as there was a moist substance dripping down from His Eyes. When I looked closer, the 'tears' seemed to have the consistency of honey. When I put it to my tongue, I was startled by my very first taste of amrit. In Hinduism, amrit is considered to be a nectar that connects one to the Divine. It symbolizes spiritual enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. It is also seen as a symbol of Divine Grace and blessings.

While we didn't understand why Swami chose this particular divine signal, we accepted it with humility and gratitude, as it was a sign of His Presence in our lives at a time of great sadness. But, seven years later, it happened again…

A dear friend of ours asked if I would consider parting with my prayer stand. As we were going to be moving home, the rationale was that Krish could always make me a new one. Though I was somewhat reluctant to part with my treasure, I eventually agreed. And for the next week, Swami shed those tears of amrit again. But it would be the last time He would do so.

In 2014, my husband Krish, whom I had married at the tender age of 18, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Over the next seven years, my life partner with whom I walked everywhere hand-in-hand, began to decline steadily. Eventually, we had to downsize our business, and I became his fulltime caregiver, as he was completely dependent on me. Even though it was an extremely challenging time, compounded by a late-stage diagnosis of gastric cancer, I felt fortified by Swami. I understood that it was all His Will and that the suffering my husband had to go through in the latter part was the karma he had to bear in this lifetime, just as it was mine to care for him. We had been blessed with a good life together, and in the end, we were also blessed with precious moments to express our love, to forgive one another for our shortcomings, to cherish our togetherness, and eventually, to let go, unto God. My beloved husband died in 2021, at the age of 79.

Barely six months later, my home was destroyed by the floods of 2022.

My son and I were home at the time, and we tried furiously to keep the waters out. But our efforts were in vain. Eventually, my son suggested that perhaps the outside drain needed to be unblocked. But as soon as we opened the patio door to go outside and check the drain, our German Shepherd Zoey, began barking at us furiously, and impeded our way. She would not let us step out the door. A moment later, our neighbour's property came crashing down upon our house. The mountain of concrete and sand that fell, stopped a few centimetres short of our patio door! Unfortunately, Zoey wasn't so lucky. She had been a few steps ahead of us, barking and blocking our way, and as a result, was buried by the landslide.

Forty years after I had first called out to Him, I found myself crying out desperately to Sai Baba again.This time, it was together with my son. We screamed and screamed to Swami for help, while digging frantically

to get Zoey out. And once again, He came to our rescue. Zoey managed to scratch her way through to the surface and was miraculously saved.

At first, I could not believe what Swami was putting me through. But then, I realised He had just used our dog to save us. Had Zoey not prevented us from going outside, we would have been the ones buried in the landslide. Zoey was severely traumatized by her near-death experience. But our little lifesaver is currently receiving therapy and now sleeps inside with us, so she can be close to her 'pack' and feel safe again.

As for the Big Lifesaver, Swami's ways are sometimes inscrutable. As painful as our experiences can sometimes be, and though they may cause us many tears of sorrow, I know that God only permits those experiences which He knows we have the strength to deal with. And I thank Swami for the many positive experiences He blesses me with every day.

Perhaps that's what my divine signal was all about:
A lesson for finding the sweetness even in life's pain… the amrit in the tears...

SALOME GOVENDER, 68
UMGENI PARK, DURBAN

Since misfortune or fortune are the inevitable consequences of our actions, Baba saves us from them by:

1. ***Strengthening us to bear their impact;***
2. ***Reducing their impact by interposing Bhakthi towards Him, between the distress and us (like an umbrella which shelters us from rain, or footwear which prevents thorns from hurting our soles);***
3. ***Preparing us to treat both fortune and misfortune as equally illusory and meaningless;***
4. ***Himself bearing the illness and completely preventing it from affecting us.***
5. ***Himself appearing in person or as some other person to avert the calamity in time.***[37]

OM SRI SAI MAHESHWARA SWAROOPAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Embodiment of Lord Shiva

81. GLASS SHRAPNEL, BUT NO BLINKING

I was 23 years old when my father died. It was 1972. He used to take me to the Ramakrishna Centre, so when he passed, I felt utterly despondent and lost. Fortunately, my maama (mother's brother), stepped into the vacuum and introduced us to Sai Baba and to attending bhajans at the unit 2 centre in Bayview.

In 1974, outside the Blue Waters Hotel in Durban, I was involved in a 7-car pile-up. In those days, we did not have the habit of wearing our safety belts, and my head went straight through the windscreen. All I recall is that I cried out for *"Sai Baba! Sai Baba!"* My left eye was severely impacted with glass shrapnel which was to later cause me great pain. As it was still the height of apartheid, I could not be treated at Addington Hospital and had to be transported all the way to King Edward Hospital in Umbilo, where I was told that some of the glass pieces could not be removed. I would have to live with it. Still, I felt fortunate not to have lost my eyesight.

In January 1975, I finally got the opportunity to visit Prashanthi Nilayam. My mother and I travelled as part of a small tour group. We arrived at the ashram at around 11h00 and my silly first impulse was to do my laundry! That is, until I heard beautiful voices wafting in from the direction of the mandir. We quickly rushed towards it and as soon as I saw Sai Baba I found myself overwhelmed by tears. At the time, I felt grateful for my long hair as it helped to mask my sobs!

Two days later, my mother and I left the ashram to continue our tour of South India's temples. But Puttaparthi beckoned again, and two weeks later, we found ourselves back at the gates of Prashanthi Nilayam. This time however, we had arrived at 21h00, not realizing that the ashram gates would be closed. Without a backup plan, I actually had the temerity to tell the sevadal to go and call Professor Kasturi whom I had only read about in Howard Murphet's book "Man of Miracles." But the sevadal duly obliged and, would you believe it, Prof Kasturi actually came! What a humble man.

I gave him a long story about our travel woes, and rather than being annoyed at my impertinence, he was very apologetic. He said that the ashram was full because of Shivarathri and that the only space available was on the verandah. But we gladly accepted his kindness and made ourselves as comfortable as one could get - on a verandah! We woke early the next morning to wash our faces at an outside tap, and to find my maama. After organizing better accommodation for us outside the ashram, he reminded us of the importance of Shivarathri, and instructed us not to blink! For Baba was known to occasionally produce a lingam out of His own Body, our attention needed to be wholly on Him.

At 11h00, we gathered in the Poornachandra hall. There we saw Prof Kasturi hold up a silver urn over a murthi of Shirdi Sai Baba. As soon as Swami put His Hand into the urn, vibuthi flowed out of it. When He took His Hand out, the flow of vibuthi stopped. This vibuthi abhishekam has now become famous, but it was quite something to directly behold the enormous amount of vibuthi that flowed out of that small silver urn.

But my fortune didn't stop there. As Swami walked past us, He also took two letters that I had written. My cup was overflowing. But I was also tired. So my mother and I decided to go get some rest and come back the next morning. But of course, my maama would not hear of it. This was, after all, the great night of Shiva.

We gathered again at 18h00 that evening, just in time to see Swami writhing in pain... I could not bear it… it was too much to see… my tears kept falling… Finally… out of Swami's mouth… emerged a small light green lingam. Yes, we had not blinked!

This lingam already came with a Shiva Namo across it, that is the three horizontal stripes with a dot in the middle. But this was no ordinary dot – this dot was actually a diamond. In His discourse which followed, Swami said that those who were blessed to witness the emergence of this Atma Lingam would not be reborn. Which is hard to imagine, because as soon as Swami got up to leave, so too did this very tired and ignorant meat-eater. I needed to sleep.

In the two weeks that followed, my maama pestered Prof Kasturi every day, and we did Navagraha prayers, all to gain the boon of an interview. Finally, Swami acceded to our wishes, and 36 South Africans found ourselves crammed into the little interview room. I sat right in front of Swami holding up a tape deck, and waiting expectantly for Him to speak (yes, those were the days of tape decks). Instead, Swami looked at me and gestured "No" with His finger. I got such a fright that I dropped the tape deck!

Then, right under my nose, Swami waved His Hand and materialised vibuthi which He poured directly into my mother's palm. The vibuthi was so fresh, it was still hot! My mother was sitting to the right of Swami and the two of them had not exchanged a single word. But needless to say, she was delighted. For many years, my mother had suffered with bleeding fingers. Despite consultations with several dermatologists, the condition had persisted. Until that one Divine Touch, which cured her of it completely. (After the interview, we purchased a little silver container to hold the materialised vibuthi, but little did we know that this was to be Akshaya vibuthi. That container is never depleted, and we continue to use it in times of need, even presently.)

My maama, who was sitting on the left of Swami, then said: *"This is my third trip Swami. Please can you give me a japamala."* To which Swami responded, pointing to His heart: **"Japamala is here."** He continued, looking at us all: **"You come from a very rich country. Materially rich, but spiritually, very poor. There is only one caste, the caste of humanity. There is only religion, the religion of love. There is only one language, the language of the heart. There is only one God. And He is Omnipresent."** Swami then got up to hand out little sachets of vibuthi which had been packed after the morning's vibuthi abhishekam. He said: **"Take it and give it to all the people in South Africa who are sick."**

Thereafter, everyone in the interview room began filing out and, on the way, bending to take padanamaskar. But clumsy me tripped over instead! My left eye ended up hitting Swami's knee - or should I say, Swami's knee hit my left eye! Either way, ever since that 'accidental' contact, I have no longer been bothered by the glass shrapnel and the pain in my eye has eased.

I feel really fortunate to have experienced all these miracles on that fateful trip. Even the requests in my two letters were later fulfilled. But 1984 was my year of transformation. Following a trip back to the ashram, this time with both my children, I not only became a vegetarian, but also an active worker and a Balvikas/EHV teacher.

I know that absolutely nothing happens without the Will of He who is none other than the embodiment of Lord Shiva Himself. (Just like the fact that this account is being captured, exactly 50 years later, by the granddaughter of one of the couples in our tour group, when we first travelled to see God. I'd call that yet another Sai-incidence!)

I love You, Swami.

VASAGIE PILLAY, 76
JOHANNESBURG

Baba creates these symbols of Shiva in Himself and allows thousands to witness their emergence, on the Great Night dedicated to the worship of Shiva - He who reduces all to the ultimate ash.

For His devotee, this gift of ash is the panacea for all physical, mental and intellectual illnesses.[38]

OM SRI SAI ANNA VASTRA DAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Provides Food and Clothing

82. MY £5 DAY

In October 2002, I turned 21. With the 'key to freedom' in my hand, I was granted an opportunity to work in England, where my friends assured me it would be easy to secure the work that I believed was promised to me. Filled with youthful energy and ambitious dreams, I promptly resigned from my job, and used all my savings to journey to a new country in search of life's greener pastures.

However, a month went by and I still had no job. Every day, I would walk hopefully into the Job Centre, only to find that there were just no jobs available. When I was lucky enough to get called in for interviews, I was simply not successful at securing the prized job. Soon, my second month in England was drawing to a close, and I was down to the last £5 which remained in my wallet. After that, I'd be completely broke. I was completely stressed out and at my wits end as to what to do next. But that very same day, I was called in for an interview as a gym contract salesman in a small town called Oxted. As fate would have it, the return train ticket for travel to and from Oxted cost £5. I prayed to Swami, and took the chance. I may not have had any money, but I did have faith.

When I arrived for the interview, the manager asked all the candidates to put on swimming trunks and to prepare for a training and stamina session, which included diving to the bottom of the deep-end of the pool and saving a dummy with the weight of a human. We swam for over an hour in an Olympic-sized pool, performing various drills. Then, at the end of the session, we were asked to shower and change back into our clothes, whereafter we would have the actual face-to-face interview.

Unfortunately, my morning had been rushed, and I hadn't eaten a single morsel of food. After the intense swimming drill, I became famished. To the extent that when I entered the private changeroom, I blacked out and collapsed on the floor. I was alone in the changeroom with the door locked. Slowly, I regained consciousness, and tried to move my body and open my eyes. But I couldn't. It was then that I remembered that I always carry vibuthi in my wallet. Still not able to see, I began to feel my way to my trousers. The short distance to my trouser-pocket felt like an Everest-climb, but I managed to eventually reach it. Feeling for my wallet, I took out and grasped the precious little yellow packet of vibuthi. With a little pinch between my fingers, I placed Swami's miraculous vibuthi into my mouth. What happened next is a memory I will never forget…

As soon as the vibuthi touched my tongue, my eyesight returned, instantaneously. My body began to fill with energy, enabling me to stand up. Even though I had read about it before, it was only then that I understood the truly healing power of vibuthi, because I experienced it for myself. I managed to change into my work clothes and get ready for the interview. Whilst doing so, I spoke to Swami: *"Swami, I am so hungry, but I don't even have a cent left to buy food. Please help me."*

Well, the Lord heard me, because as soon as I emerged from the changeroom, a gentleman came up to me and asked where I had been for so long. Before I could reply, he said, *"Go to the company restaurant and help yourself to whatever you would like to eat."* My, oh my! It felt like Swami had appeared in front of me Himself and answered my prayer immediately. As I ate to my heart's content, I knew that our Lord would never let His devotee starve.

When the interview was over, I took the return train back home, with nothing but vibuthi in my wallet. But it was a packet of vibuthi with an incomprehensible power. Now more than ever, I was brimming with faith. For Swami had showed me that He was with Me, and that He would never forsake me. Later that very same day, I received not one, but two job offers!

On that £5-day, my body may have collapsed, but my heart felt the Lord's blessings shower down upon me in abundance. And my mind learnt that all we ever need to live by, is Faith and Surrender to our Swami.

DHIREN NAIDU, 44
BALLITO, KZN

83. PRASADAM FOR TWO HUNGRY STOMACHS

It was in 2015, four years after Swami's Mahasamadhi, when my husband Sundres and I arrived at the ashram, very late one evening. By the time we fetched our keys and found our room on the third floor of the roundhouse, it was around 20h45. By this stage, we were famished. We didn't have any food with us, so I told Sundres that I would go down to find a kiosk and buy us some tea or coffee and hopefully some snacks to eat.

But as I walked around, I found everything to be quiet and shuttered. There was no one in sight. So I walked back up those three flights of stairs and told Sundres: *"Sorry, but I couldn't get anything for us. We will just have to drink some water. I am very tired, so I'm going to sleep."*

No sooner had I said that, than we heard this voice at the bottom of the stairs calling out: *"Swami's prasadam! Swami's prasadam! Is there anybody here?"* I recall there being only about two families staying in our roundhouse, but I could hear the sound of a gentleman's chappals as he walked all the way up the stairs and right to our door. When he knocked, I opened our door immediately. He said: *"There! Swami's prasadam for you!"* and then he handed us two big bundles of food wrapped in leaves. I couldn't believe my eyes! I just said: *"Thank you! Thank you! Om Sai Ram. Om Sai Ram."* When he turned to leave, we noticed that the man was not carrying a basket or box with more food parcels to distribute. He had just carried the two bundles in his hands!

Upon opening our leaves, we found on the one side, puli sadam (sour rice), and on the other side, sweet rice – my favourite! I was so overcome with emotion. I just ate and I ate, and I couldn't stop eating and crying! All the while wondering how Swami knew that we didn't have any food.

This unique experience has been impressed upon my mind and heart, and I will never forget it. It is a wonderful reminder of Swami's Omnipresence.

SAROJINI NAIDOO (1949-2024)
SUNDARASA NAIDOO, 79
PARLOCK, DURBAN

This account was transcribed and edited from a video recorded by Sarojini Naidoo before her passing, which is in itself a story to tell: After weeks of intensive sadhana, including the recitation of the Sai Satcharitra, and after spending the 9th day of Navarathri in prayer and singing bhajans with family, she suffered a stroke and slipped into a coma in the early morning hours of Vijaya Dasami (The Day of Victory). Five days later, after her loved ones had a chance to say their goodbyes, Sarojini Naidoo passed on 12 October 2024, at the age of 75.

"In the abode of my devotees, there will be no dearth of food and clothing."

'Anna' (food) is also synonymous with health and 'Vastra' (clothing) with honour. Baba grants both to His children. [39]

OM SRI SAI SAMSARA DUHKHA KSHAYAKARAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Destroys the Suffering of Worldly Existence and the Cycle of Birth and Death

84. NEVER KNEW LOVE LIKE THIS

"I never knew love like this before.
Now I'm lonely never more,
Since you came into my life."
- Stephanie Mills

For some reason, this song by Stephanie Mills was the one selected for me to sing in the late 90's as part of a Sai youth musical production called 'The Love Chronicle'. At the time, I had no idea what it would come to mean, and what life had in store for us.

Vernon and I were joyfully married in 2002. A week later, I attended the Varsity Drive Sai Centre for the very first time. I was feeling somewhat lost and overwhelmed, and I sat at the back, simply giving chorus to the bhajans. That same night I was tossed in a dream in which I was sitting in Prashanthi Nilayam enjoying a bhajan session, when Swami walked up to me and asked: **"What happened? Why didn't you sing tonight?"** Since then, I have known that singing and chanting, were my tools for self-transformation - tools that would give me strength in the tough years to come.

Two years into marriage and after failing in our attempts to fall pregnant, Vernon and I decided to join our parents on a trip to Prashanthi for Shivarathri. Being in the presence of God undoubtedly envelopes you in bliss, but it also twists you around, forcing you to mend wayward habits and to turn within. After a week at the ashram, I was awakened by a terrible dream, dripping with sweat. In the dream, I could only see blood and it was terribly unpleasant, but at the time I did not understand its meaning. In the days that followed, several incidents occurred which led us to believe that it was all meant to unfold exactly the way it did…

Vernon was donating blood at the Super Specialty Hospital and began chatting with a gentleman from the UK. At that afternoon's darshan, Vernon was in the first row and the same gentleman came over and handed him a pack of vibuthi for Swami to bless. With the vibuthi between his two palms, Swami touched Vernon's hands transmitting a palpable Divine Energy through him. Strangely, the man from the UK never returned for his blessed vibuthi. It became ours – for use in the most difficult time in our lives. Then, a day before Shivarathri, I was out in the village shopping in a precious gems shop, when I was approached by the owner, who said: *"Do you know that you are pregnant?"* Needless to say, I was taken aback by his comment. But despite my doubts, I went ahead and bought a pregnancy test kit from the village pharmacy. On the morning of Maha Shivarathri, the pregnancy test result was a clear "Positive+".

Feeling both nervous and delighted, we returned to South Africa and experienced a normal pregnancy filled with love, joy and hope. The day before the scheduled delivery, we performed a Gayathri Hawan and on 27 September 2004, Bhagawan gifted us with a beautiful baby girl whom we named Saiesha. However, our joy was short-lived. At 3 months, I noticed a decrease in Saiesha's muscle tone, and was startled when her body became unusually still while I was feeding her. We didn't know it at the time, but this was the beginning of the seizures. Even though Saiesha's milestones were all delayed, we had faith that she would catch up and that all would be well. It was during this time that we fell pregnant again – a signal of our positivity and hope. But the possibility that our first born child could have a serious problem lurked in the background, and was soon to become devastating.

In the days and months that followed, the frequency of Saiesha's seizures increased, escalating to almost a hundred a day. We spent two years in and out of hospital, where despite harsh medication, nothing was able

to help our daughter. Our son Saiheer was born in 2005, and unfortunately had to grow up on the floors of Entabeni Hospital. We were filled with despair and heartache, and we prayed constantly to Swami for his divine intervention. The very same vibhuti that He had blessed in Prashanthi, was on the forehead of our little angel every day. Everybody who stood around her little bed, was always chanting, wrapping our baby in love, light and prayer.

Two years and many investigations later, Saiesha was eventually diagnosed with Rasmussens Encephalitis, a rare disease of the brain which results in uncontrolled seizures. The only recourse was for the affected lobe of the brain to be removed in an effort to stop the seizures. We were told that Saiesha would never be 'normal', but at least she would have a better chance at life. At this point, we were beyond tormented by the suffering she was enduring, and we questioned Swami continuously as to why we had to endure such an ordeal. After 42 days in the ICU, Saiesha's condition only worsened. We then took the painful decision not to elevate our child's treatment any further. Throughout this time, and despite her suffering, our baby had displayed such a fighting spirit. Even though unable to speak, the direct look of her eyes, and the tight squeeze of her finger, would speak a million words to us. Despite being energy-sapped and mentally broken in a million pieces, the Gayathri mantra reverberated constantly on our lips, and we felt the prayers of the entire Sai organisation behind us. I believe this gave us enormous power to ultimately accept the battle and surrender it to Swami for His decision. I only requested that Swami either allow our little one to heal or take her away in peace. Then, on 7 September 2007, Swami decided. Following the onset of septicaemia, Saiesha woke up… looked at all of us standing around her bed in prayer… and took her last breath.

Rest in peace my angel - Saiesha Chetty (2004-2007)

Those were the three hardest years of our lives. As devastating as it was to let go, we knew in our heart that it was for the better. Saiesha's short stay with us made us turn fervently to the Lord. Vernon and I were mere instruments to help her complete her karmic journey. This was a type of Love I definitely never knew before.

Since Saiesha was called to rest, we were blessed with two more angels, a son Saieshan and a daughter Saileela. Slowly, over time, their presence and love brought us joy, but always against the backdrop of Saiesha's memory which continues to permeate every part of our lives. However, in November 2023, Vernon's father, a super fit Comrades marathon runner who was our rock and support through those 3 difficult years, passed suddenly from stage 4 Lymphoma. It broke Vernon. But he couldn't stay broken, because a few months later, our 12 year old Saileela started developing strange symptoms…

It was March 2024 when Saileela first complained of back pain. We initially attributed it to her carrying a heavy school bag, but the severity of the pain gradually worsened to demand investigation. We were mildly alarmed when the orthopaedic surgeon suspected the underlying cause to be tuberculosis, but the resultant MRI and bone biopsies were not conclusive. By this stage, our little girl was suffering immense pain, especially at night. It seemed our nightmare was coming back to haunt us and that once again we were 'chosen' to watch our child suffer. Even adult-dose medications were not effective at easing her pain. After 5 weeks of enduring the horrible side effects of the drugs, we took Saileela to a neurosurgeon, where a repeat MRI and bone scan revealed Osteoblastoma in the thoracic spine - yet another very rare condition. Though 17 years had passed, this felt like déjà vu…

Our prayers and chanting intensified and we pleaded with Swami to please protect our daughter. Saileela underwent surgery to remove the tumour, which was then sent for testing. I was worried sick. But I eventually surrendered to Swami and asked Him to take over. Half an hour after the surgery, a friend visited me in hospital with a gift. When I opened the wooden box, I found a beautiful golden engraving of Swami with both His Hands raised in the Abhaya Hasta pose. I took this as Swami's reassurance that all would be well this time. And sure enough, the tumour was benign. Following an extended period of stay in the ICU and a term away from

school, Saileela is now back and even playing her sport. Words cannot describe our relief and gratitude to Swami for His Grace.

Since He came into my life at the tender age of 10, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has nourished my soul. I can never be lonely, because He is my very life-breath. Singing His sweet name has deepened my connection with the Divine, and energized me with precious energy when I needed it most. I was fortunate that my faith did not waver. But, as is natural for a parent who has suffered a great loss, Vernon struggled with his faith for a while. He stopped attending satsang and instead used his rugby as an outlet. But slowly, Vernon came full circle, and is back where he knows he belongs - at the Feet of Sai.

Despite my faith, I have still frequently questioned Swami for plunging us into such difficulties as parents. But only the Avatar knows what is best for us. He has always said that pleasure is an interval between two pains. So if pain is inevitable, the challenge for us all is to find the Love even in the midst of pain. This can be extremely difficult, because when we are blinded by pain, the Love can become unrecognisable.

At such times, all we can do… is to know that we are never alone.
And that His Love will get us through.
After all, it is the reason He came into our lives.

SHANTAL (46) & VERNON (48) CHETTY
RESERVOIR HILLS, DURBAN

85. MY BELOVED SATHYABHAMA, MY BELOVED SAI

The Sathyamma Temple is a unique and rare temple dedicated to the worship of the divine consort of Lord Krishna, Mother Sathyabhama. It was built by the pious Sri Ratnakaram Kondama Raju (Swami's paternal grandfather) who was prompted to construct the temple following a dream. In the dream, Kondama Raju saw Sathyabhama, alone, expectant and forlorn, waiting anxiously for her Lord, who had gone on an errand to bring her the much-coveted 'Parijatha' flowers. The minutes increased to hours and the hours accumulated into days but still there was no sign of Lord Krishna. Sathyabhama began to cry and a huge storm with thunder, lightning and heavy rain followed. As Kondama Raju passed the place where she stood crying, Mother Sathyabhama asked him to provide her shelter. On waking from this dream, Sri Kondama Raju was determined to build a temple for the Consort of the Lord.

Little did I know that my first trip to Prashanthi Nilayam would feature this little temple of the Divine Mother. It's where Swami would give me an inexplicable shakthi…

Following a sudden calling to attend the Aradhana Mahotsavam 2008, which I was not really prepared for, I found myself wonderstruck in Prashanthi Nilayam. With the powerful rudram chanting, abishekams, and bhajans, the Sai Kulwanth Hall was bursting with divine energy and power. Ever since 1992, when I first became a Sai devotee, I had prayed about touching the ground that Swami walked on. And there I was, filled with gratitude to Him, for fulfilling my heart's desire. I received such amazing darshan of Swami throughout that divinely orchestrated trip, but never once did I think about the reason for it all.

The day before I was due to leave, I sat during the afternoon darshan, crying uncontrollably. A devotee from Canada asked me why I was crying. When I told her that it was because I was about to go back home, she

recommended that I visit the Sathyamma Temple first. A short while later, as people got up to leave, I shuffled forward in the darshan rows and found myself now sitting next to a woman from South Africa. When she too asked the reason for my tears, and when she too recommended that I visit the Sathyamma Temple, I knew this was no coincidence. It was getting dark, I was alone, and the temple was some way down the Chitravathi River. How was I to go there by myself? But when the unknown devotee told me not to fear and that Swami would take me there, I knew that somehow, I just had to visit the temple.

For a first-time lone female traveller, the tuk-tuk ride through the village alley-ways at dusk was a scary ride. But as soon as I put my foot on the first step of the temple, I began to cry profusely. There was a force that came over me that I still cannot explain. And when I saw the beautiful white stone murthi of Mother Sathyabhama for the first time, I found myself telling her that I loved Her. *(Refer: Image p)* I offered a coconut and garland and prostrated before Her. Then, I turned to the priest, and asked him, *"Can I hold her?"* Even more surprising than my question, was that the priest agreed! I then held Mother Sathyabhama in a tight embrace, and for those few moments, an energy penetrated the core of my very being. An energy that I would need to draw on in the years ahead…

The priest clearly believed I needed more than a Divine Hug, because before I could leave, he also gave me some bangles from Mother Sathyabhama's wrist, as well as her kumkum and manja. I was elated. When I returned to the ashram, I prostrated before the idol of Lord Muruga, only to have a flower fall right on top of my head. I felt so blessed. Then, as I walked back alongside the mandir, I heard the tail-end of the arthi. I peered through the ornate brick-work, and at that precise moment, Swami turned around and looked straight at me. Our eyes met. My cup was full.

Five months later, on Thursday 9 April 2009, the auspicious day of Hanuman Jayanthi, my 19-year-old daughter Jeevani, took her own life.

We were preparing to go to satsang that evening, but before we could leave, Jeevani became agitated, and snapped for reasons only she and Swami will know. Dressed in her white Punjabi, she looked like a beautiful angel, about to meet her Creator. It was the worst nightmare any parent can ever experience.

I went into a very dark place. Why did Swami allow this to happen? Why could He not have stopped it? I did not want to believe in Swami anymore. With the help of my husband Sivee, I simply tried to survive and get through each day. My younger daughter Darshini was only 8 years old at the time, and I completely neglected my duties to her as a mother, due to my own mental trauma.

Strangely, even though I had turned my back on Swami, on 24 April 2011, when Swami discarded His own Physical Body, I felt like my whole world came crumbling down on me. I cried profusely every day. I felt as if I was in a deep dark hole and I just could not get out. I struggled to live like a normal person. Until, another tragedy struck… On the evening of Monday 3 June 2013, Sivee, my pillar of support, suffered a major heart attack, and he too passed from this world. The loss of our daughter had taken a huge toll on him. She had been our only child for eleven years and he just could not live without her.

In four years, half my family was taken away from me.

But the loss of my husband would become my wake-up call. I had to breathe, and I had to go on, for the sake of our little one. I had to take responsibility for the child I had prayed desperately for. She had come after 11 years and we had named her Darshini because we knew she was our blessing from God. So I slowly got back up, and started to drive again. With support from my family, Sai devotees, and colleagues at work, I began to raise my little daughter as a single mum. And I slowly started to hold on to Swami's Feet.

I had lost both my parents many years earlier, so I experienced many financial challenges. Darshini too, was in and out of hospital as a young child, pining for her father and sister. I began to ask Swami to give me the strength to look after this child and to do the things a normal parent can do. And as time went by, I began to get involved in His work again, participating in seva projects. Now, with hindsight and a clear mind, I can see that all those people that helped me along the way were none other than our dearest Swami, in each of those beings. He was with me all along.

It has been 16 years since I lost my daughter Jeevani. My younger daughter Darshini has turned out to be a most remarkable human, who has obtained a degree in psychology, and who has a passion for helping young children facing mental challenges. I have also graduated as a Balvikas guru and am currently teaching at our Sai centre. None of this would have been achieved if Swami did not carry us through it all. It is only because of His love for us that we made it through our karmic journey.

So, 17 years after my first trip, when an opportunity presented itself for me to go back to Prashanthi Nilayam in June 2025 for the Mahila Ladies Conference, I grabbed it. I just wanted to say '*Thank You*' to Swami for helping me survive it all. On 3 June, my husband's death anniversary, I went to the Chitravathi River and offered a prayer for the departed souls in my family. Then on 8 June, my 55th birthday, I was blessed with the opportunity to offer a rose at Swami's Sannidhi, and to experience my own special divya darshan at Swami's Lotus Feet. This humble offering represented my heartfelt gratitude for keeping me alive, for giving me the strength to raise my younger daughter as a single parent, and for enabling me to continue doing His work.

And yes, I returned to visit the Sathyamma Temple to give my gratitude to the Beloved Mother. This time, the kind priest not only gave me Her bangles, kumkum and manja, but he also gave me the treasure of Her sari, which he removed from under Her outer garments. I do not know the reason for Mother Sathyabhama's significance in my life. Perhaps Her story of being alone, expectant, and crying for days in a terrible storm, waiting for Her Lord, was to be mirrored in my life, as a mother and wife. All I know is that I have weathered the worst storm. And only because my Beloved Sai gave me Shelter.

Despite what we may have to go through, Swami is the only One that will listen to us without judgement. He is the only One that can help us cross this Ocean of Samsara. It was He who steered my ship of sorrow and pain, while never allowing me to drown. Today, doing His work, and thinking only of Him, are the only things that make me happy.

JOY GOUNDEN, 55
STANGER, KZN

86. THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

I issued Swami with an ultimatum.

"I trusted You," I'd said. *"You were supposed to protect us like the eyelids protect the eyes. Until You prove to me that You are actually doing that, I am no longer Your devotee."* Those were my words to Him. Words spoken in grief. And in anger. But words that betrayed all the love He had showered on me over the years…

I was 9 years old when Swami entered my life. My aunt and I would take the bus to attend a satsang that was some distance from our home. But from the very first bhajan I heard, I felt deeply connected to Sathya Sai Baba,

and never missed the weekly gatherings. In fact, I would even call all the neighbourhood children to sing bhajans on the days between Thursdays! I was given a small pendant of Swami which I would carry to school every day in the top pocket of my blazer. One day, I noticed that vibuthi had manifested under the pendant's plastic covering. I excitedly showed it to my mum, only to be met with mild curiosity. None of my family showed much interest in Sai Baba, but within our local community, stories of His miracles were spreading fast. Soon my mum acquired a share of the 'magical roht' which seemingly grew in tea. The practice required that any excess roht, if not shared, be placed in a river. The day my mum went down to the river to do just that, was the day I began to have the visions.

Lying on His side, propped up on one arm, on the banks of the river, wearing white, was how I saw Swami. He had a broad smile on His face. But then, everywhere I looked, I could see Him. In different coloured robes. With different facial expressions. It was like watching a slideshow in front of my own eyes. As a 10-year-old, this was an unfathomable experience for me, and I became very emotional. Every time I saw Swami, I would break down and cry. My 'slideshow' lasted for about 3 days. Eventually, my mum couldn't bear to see me crying any longer, so she prayed to Swami to make it stop. And He obliged.

A few months later, we headed down to Durban to visit family. But I was not feeling well. I had a headache, and my scalp was burning and itching. Upon inspection, my mum discovered kumkum on the top of my head. It was not a lot - probably half a teaspoonful - which the ladies in my family helped themselves to! I myself didn't think much of it, probably because I was too young to understand or probably because I was simply feeling icky. But I recall my mother pointing out the kumkum to the family saying: *"It's on the thalai uchi (crown chakra)."* It is said that a balanced crown chakra promotes gratitude, contentment, and a deeper understanding of life's purpose. If that is true, how could it then be that I would end up issuing Swami with an ultimatum?! Well, there's more…

One afternoon, when I was about 12 years old, I begged my mum and brother to take me to the Sai centre in Lorne Street, Durban, which I had heard about. There, the kind lady of the house called me to the shrine and gave me a handful of rice, with the instruction to eat a grain a day. I accepted it gratefully before wrapping the rice grains in some paper, and then placing it at our own shrine back at home. The next day, while I was at school, my mum caught sight of something oozing out of the small parcel of rice - it was amrit. This was the leela that eventually brought my mother around. From that day onwards, she became an ardent devotee of Sathya Sai Baba.

As for me, the teenage years that followed saw me being deeply troubled by the pain and suffering I witnessed all around me. I was always disturbed by scenes of poverty, and would constantly question Swami as to why we were all even here? It was during this stage in my life that I uttered a prayer, without fully understanding its implications: *"Swami, I don't want to come back to this world,"* I prayed. "*Whatever karma I have to go through, please give it to me now, and help me through it, so that I don't come back*." Sometimes, it is easier to utter the words, than to live out the meaning of those words…

Fast-forward to 1991, by which time I had married my husband Ron, and had two beautiful children, a daughter and a son. One Thursday, during satsang, the candle flames from the arthi shot out towards me. I was standing in the front row and got quite a shock, but I soon dismissed it as an insignificant incident. The next day, the 300-litre geyser in our newly-built home burst, and boiling hot water came gushing out everywhere. Panic-stricken, and without thinking, I stood under the geyser, and reached for the valve in order to close it shut. Despite being soaked by the scalding hot water, I didn't feel a thing. Later, when a horrified friend arrived and tried to persuade me to go to hospital to be examined, I refused. For I had suffered no burning or blistering whatsoever. In some strange way, it appears that the sparks from the previous night's arthi, were to be the only burns I would feel. If this was how my karma was being lessened, I was deeply grateful.

Then, in 2020, the year of the global pandemic, everything began to change… In August, at the age of 63, I suffered my first heart attack, which required the insertion of a stent. Less than 1,5 years later, my husband Ron was admitted to hospital for an undiagnosed malaise. And my only daughter Dashika was diagnosed with an aggressive breast cancer.

While Ron was in hospital, on 21 January 2022, I had a dream in which I saw Swami, also in hospital. This was most unusual as I very rarely dreamt of Swami...

Three days later, my dear husband Ron, passed from this world. He had developed a lung infection, which later brought on a heart attack. Had he still been around, I don't think Ron would have coped with having to watch our daughter's decline.

But I was still around. And I had no choice but to cope. I prayed to Swami to cure her. I prayed to Swami to protect her from the ravages of the deadly disease. To protect her 'like the eyelids protect the eyes.' But Dashika declined rapidly… Soon, it was stage 4... and my daughter was refusing life support and hospitalisation… She wanted to die at home.

That is when I issued God with the ultimatum.
"Prove to me that You are actually protecting us! Or else, I'm done with You."

The same woman who had been blessed with a personal slideshow of Swami, with vibuthi, kumkum, and amrit; the same woman who had been protected from scalding burns; and the same woman who had prayed not to come back, had forgotten it all. Grief had blinded me. Anger had blinded me. Even Dashika told me not to be angry with Swami. *"This is my karma, my journey, mum,"* she'd said. Still, I couldn't bring myself to pray.

Both the nurse and the doctor who would regularly check on her at home, kept insisting that we should get morphine as the pain at stage 4 cancer is unbearable. But Dashika, who ordinarily had no threshold for pain, never required a single painkiller, even at the very end. She died peacefully on 2nd November 2023, without even a gasp. When she was a 3-week-old baby, my mum had placed Dashika to sleep on a duvet on the floor next to a picture frame of Swami. Checking in on her a short while later, we found our sleeping angel in a circle of freshly-showered vibuthi! But the circle of my daughter's life was to end at the age of 43.

She was the mother to an 8-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter.

How could this be deemed 'protecting us like the eyelids protect the eyes'?! I was grief-stricken. But I couldn't dwell in my grief. I simply had to take over Dashika's life; there was shopping that needed to be done; the picking and dropping off at school; the homework; the chores; we simply had to get on with it. It was in those moments of simply trying to carry on… of being too busy to grieve or to be angry… that I began to see… what I hadn't seen before.

... In that rare dream of Swami I'd had in January 2022 - the one in which I had seen Him in hospital… Swami had also been clutching His chest… And He was crying with pain.

How could I have failed to join the dots?!

My husband Ron had passed peacefully at the age of 75. He was on a ventilator and had felt no pain. My daughter had passed in the comfort of her home, and unlike so many victims of cancer, she had experienced no physical pain at all. And perhaps most miraculously, her two children were unbelievably strong throughout their ordeal. When she left us, they did not react as if they had just lost their mother. The stoic demeanour of ones so young can only be ascribed to an unseen Hand - Swami's Unseen Hand.

But to me, He had actually shown His hand. In my dream.
It was me who had failed to see.
That in clutching His chest, and in crying with pain,
The Lord had taken on all *their* pain.

With insight restored, and realization dawning, I began to pray again, with humility and deep gratitude. And I prayed to be forgiven for my foolish ultimatums.

Three months later, in February 2024, I had a second heart attack, which warranted bypass surgery. Fortunately, I recovered quickly, and without the need for painkillers.

But then again, three months later, in June 2024, I had a third heart attack. This too required more bypass surgery, but due to the still fresh scar tissue, the doctors advised that this was simply not possible. I was told that nothing more could be done for me and that I just needed to go home and rest. All I can say is that I tried. I tried simply to take it easy… and to stay alive… for the sake of my grandchildren.

But then, in June 2025, I had a fourth heart attack. After seeing my grandson off to school, I returned to sit on my bed, when I felt the now familiar symptoms. As I knew that the doctors couldn't do anything more for me, I simply prayed. I told Swami that I understood this was all my karma, coming at me with increasing intensity. But I also told Him that I would really appreciate a few more years, for the sake of my youngest grandchild.

A friend then arrived at my door, and set in motion a call to my GP, who arranged a consultation with another cardiologist. Upon examining me in the ICU, this young doctor caught sight of the sealed yellow packet of vibuthi I was clutching in my hand. "*Oh, I know Him,*" he said matter-of-factly. He then got a pair of scissors, cut open the packet, and rubbed the vibuthi on my forehead, neck and chest, himself! Barely a week before, this young cardiologist had just lost his own mother, and there he was, tending to me in such a kind manner. Following the arrival of specially-ordered cardiac equipment, he was able to perform a ballooning and to insert 3 more stents into my now weary heart.

So, this is where I am today - a grandmother, hoping to live just a few more years. I am no longer able to attend satsang like I used to. But I also no longer issue ultimatums like I used to. Because I can now see how Swami has always been taking care of me. Even my financial independence, I owe completely to Him. I don't consider myself as having a high pain threshold. And yet, I too have never been in need of painkillers following any of my cardiac surgeries. In clutching His own chest and crying with pain, not only did our Compassionate Swami absorb the pain of Ron's lung infection, and Dashika's cancer, but He has also been absorbing the pain associated with my own heart attacks. Words cannot sufficiently express my gratitude.

I asked Him to reveal how He protects like the eyelids protect the eyes - He did.
I asked Him to help clear my karma - He has.
I asked Him to give me a little more time - He is.
And if again, I have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death ,
I know that He will still be there,
Waiting patiently for me.
I love You, Swami.

VINO PADAYACHEE, 68
PIETERMARITZBURG

Since birth, growth, decline and death are the inevitable phases of life, and since integration and disintegration, evolution and involution, contraction and expansion, are the phases of creation, the universe itself is Samsara.

And dukha or suffering is its native characteristic.

This wheel of Samsara crushes the individual unless he knows how to escape it. Baba helps us to diminish and destroy the suffering latent in Samsara. [40]

OM SRI SAI SARVA MATA SAMMATAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Represents all Faiths

87. A SPIRITUAL QUEST FULFILLED

My search began as a young boy of 9 years. I was always intrigued with my surroundings, especially nature. I used to gaze at the sky with great admiration, wondering who created the stars and the universe. In fact, who was responsible for all of this wonderous Creation?

Our family had a huge temple in the yard with pictures of almost every deity. Sometimes, I would sit in that temple to simply enjoy the peace and serenity. Still, I was very confused by the different shapes and appearances of the many God-forms. Thus began my quest for the Truth. I questioned my parents, my school teachers, as well as many Hindu, Christian and Moslem priests. Why were there so many religions in the world? Why were there so many forms of God? None of them could give me a reasonable answer.

Then one day in 1983, my wife Shiela and I entered a shrine in Reservoir Hills where Swami's services were being conducted. I stood transfixed at the entrance of the hall, rooted to the spot. On the wall was a huge Sarva Dharma sign, with symbols of all the major religions in a circular form, with a light in the centre. I learnt that this was the emblem of the Sai organization, and its founder member was Sai Baba. Finally, I was beginning to find answers to my quest for Truth.

I was motivated to attend the Sai services every Thursday. After a month, and due to the need to formally register the Centre and to select its office bearers, the Centre members turned towards me to be the Vice Chairperson. I was totally new to the Sai organization, so I declined the position. But the officials were so persistent that they gave me one week to make my decision. After much inner deliberation, I felt a prompting, and decided to assume the role.

That very same Thursday, I applied for 8 weeks of my accumulated leave to go to India on a pilgrimage. When I arrived home after work, my little daughter showed me a letter that had arrived by post. It was a letter from the Department of Community Development advising that there were 11 homes available for purchase in Grosdale Close, Newlands West. We were excited beyond measure to finally have the opportunity to have our own home. So we left immediately to view the area and choose our home. However, there were no road names, and we very quickly got lost. Suddenly, two little boys appeared out of nowhere. They didn't hesitate to jump into our car even though we were total strangers and they guided us to exactly where we needed to be.

The next morning, I contacted the department and was allocated number 10 Grosdale Close. But I was required to pay a deposit of R5000, which back then was a lot of money. I approached my boss yet again, this time requesting a loan. He looked at me and said: *"Nithya, yesterday you asked for 8 weeks of extended leave. Today, you want money to buy a house!"* I told him that it was all due to my spiritual Guru's divine interventions. Not only was I given a cheque for the R5000, but I was also advised to take the whole day off to sort out my housing application. I was extremely happy with Swami's blessings being showered upon us.

Shiela and I left for India in November 1983. We toured many cities, and finally, we boarded a 34-hour train to Bangalore from Delhi. In the cabin next to ours, was a university student whose shoulder bag bore the Sarva Dharma symbol. This student related many interesting stories of his family's experiences with Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba. These stories were so engaging that we never felt the long journey from Delhi to Bangalore station.

On our arrival, we still had to undertake a 6-hour bus journey to Prashanthi Nilayam. Again, we met a Sai devotee on the trip. It was Mr C R Singh's son who regaled us with wonderful stories about Swami. And when

we reached Prashanthi and were allocated shed accommodation, imagine my surprise when I was allocated a space on the shed floor right next to Mr C R Singh himself! Swami had taken care of us through every step of our journey.

We were new to ashram life, and the shed certainly took getting used to. But Mr Singh advised us not to be disillusioned with the limited resources and facilities. As I stood in the queue for the toilet, I read the bold instruction stuck on the toilet door – 'Do not use paper. Use water only.' – which explained the small tins devotees would carry in their hands! Mr Singh informed me that many of these devotees standing in the toilet queue were millionaires travelling from far and wide. I will never forget this great lesson in humility.

My first darshan of the Lord was one of huge excitement. As I looked around, absorbing the dynamic silence, I noticed with awe the diversity of people sitting silently and waiting for the arrival of Swami. They were all of different colours, nationalities and creeds. In that moment, I felt such contentment knowing that whilst South Africa was erupting with uprisings and riots under the apartheid regime of 1983, here I was, enjoying the peace of a non-toxic world.

As Swami approached us, a rotund person seated directly in front of me began sobbing. Swami came straight up to him and told him not to cry, during which time we all had a chance to touch Swami's Feet. Swami then took a handful of rice from a tray and threw it all around us. Throughout the remainder of darshan, I felt local devotees touching my hair and my shoulder, not realising that they were picking off the rice grains! And when darshan concluded, they swooped on the floor to pick up every remaining grain of rice they could find. Such was their implicit faith and devotion to Swami of which I was totally ignorant. This was yet another unforgettable lesson.

Half of our shed came to be used by foreign devotees for Christmas choir practices under the tutelage of a lady from the London Philharmonic Orchestra. One day, as she trained us, 9 unlit candles, which she had placed on the window sill behind her, spontaneously lit up in huge flames, all on their own. The choir gasped in shock. But she turned around and calmly said: *"See! Swami is present and is a silent witness to our practice."* This was the first miracle to take place, right in front of my eyes.

It was a truly blissful trip during which we enjoyed and received Swami's Divine Energy over the course of both His birthday and Christmas celebrations. When we returned to SA, we were blessed by Swami to move into our own brand new home in early 1984. Throughout our trip, and subsequently, throughout our lives, Swami has been our guide, taking care of our every need.

When I said yes to Swami as Vice Chairperson of the Varsity Drive centre, my spiritual quest started being fulfilled. Beginning with those great lessons in humility, faith, and devotion, I continue to learn from Swami's teachings every day. With the hope that one day, I will understand the greatest lesson of all…

That the Creator and His Creation are One.

NITHYA NAIDOO, 77
MORNINGSIDE, DURBAN

88. SAI MIRACLE IN A CHURCH

The year was 1994 when my family embarked on our very first trip to India. We started our tour in Mumbai, and made our way through various other cities, before finally arriving in Puttaparthi, where we were so excited to receive the divine darshan of our beloved Lord, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Some months before our departure, my wife had a dream of Baba, which she shared with my sister-in-law. At the time, my wife did not fully understand it, nor did she grasp the magnitude of having Baba visit her in a dream. Both women were now in the travel group, excitedly making its way to see Baba in His Physical Form.

Prasanthi Nilayam was abuzz with devotees from all over the world converging to celebrate a beautiful Sai Christmas in the Divine Abode. Devotees longed for the opportunity to be in close proximity to our beloved Sai and to have His blessings. We were also very eager to finally see Baba, but as soon as we arrived, my 7-year-old son fell gravely ill.

The onset of his illness was sudden, with no observable symptoms or prior warning signs. From the time we arrived, he stopped eating any solid food, resulting in rapid weight loss and sunken eyes. My wife kept vigil over him constantly. She tried to force medication and to rehydrate him, with little success. As his health continued to deteriorate, he just lay listless on the mattress, without an ounce of energy. I carried him from our room in the South block, to the general hospital located near the Ganesha temple and main entrance. But the doctors were baffled as to the cause of illness and how to treat it. They provided some medication, but there was still no sign of improvement. Despite taking my son to the general hospital for three consecutive days, his condition did not improve. He was still not eating any solid food. I began to worry for his life. I even wondered how I would take back my son's 'dead body' back home, if this dire situation did not change.

Unlike myself, my wife was an ardent devotee, who had unwavering faith in Sri Sathya Sai Baba. She would always say, *"Baba will never let us down. He will take care of all our problems."* I, on the other hand, was full of despair and hopelessness. My wife remained by my son's side for seven days. Since our arrival, she had not attended darshan once. Finally, on the seventh day, she was encouraged, having come so far, to have the divine sight of our Lord. But not without carrying my son with her.

It was during this darshan, that my sister-in-law suddenly recalled the dream my wife had told her about, back in South Africa, many months before we set out on our journey. It was a hair-raising experience as they both recalled the details of the dream. In it, Baba had appeared and told my wife, **"The day you arrive in Prasanthi Nilayam, your son will take ill. He will be ill for seven days. Do not worry. Take him to a church. He will be okay."**

Immediately after darshan, my wife and my sister-in-law came to me and informed me of this recalled dream. Wondering how I could find a church in the small village of Puttaparthi, I quickly went outside the ashram and enquired with the local tuk-tuk drivers. After being informed of a church in the nearby village of Kothacheruvu, my wife and I, together with our daughter and our still very ill son, squeezed into a tuk-tuk and rode 22km to the church. I carried my son into the Christian sanctuary and the pastor immediately began to pray for him in his native Telugu. He was joined in prayer by his wife and daughter. When they finished, the pastor offered my son a mandarin and, to our utter amazement, he ate the entire fruit with relish. His energy returned immediately. The son I had carried into the church, walked out on his own.

We now know that Baba appears in our dreams only if He wills it. This entire experience served to prove that Baba knows the past, the present and the future of each and every one of us. To this day, the pastor and his

family still recollect this miracle with fondness, and share their experience with all.

We are ever grateful to Sri Sathya Sai Baba, our merciful Lord, who shows time and again, that He is the embodiment of all the Divine Names and Forms, and that He will come to our rescue no matter what Name or Form is called.

PAT GOVINTHU, 75
JOHANNESBURG

89. THERE IS ONLY ONE RELIGION

I was born into a Hindu family and I married a Muslim man. We have faced much ridicule and criticism as a family, but it doesn't matter. For us, there is only one religion - the religion of Love. And we regard Swami as no less than a Prophet, much like Prophet Muhammed was (PBUH).

I learnt of Sai Baba from a young age and I've visited Prashanthi Nilayam nine times over the years. At the ashram, I met devotees from all over the world, from Spain to Iran, and heard many wonderous stories about His miracles. My husband Basheer and I have washed dishes and carried concrete at the ashram. We have attended two World Conferences, one of which entailed carrying a wooden Lingam containing the waters from seven rivers in South Africa. My daughter was also one of three children selected from across the world to be a mascot at Swami's 70th birthday celebrations. Our children have attended both Madressa and Balvikas. I do Namaaz and fast for Ramadhan, and Basheer fasts for Navarathri. None of our family eats beef or pork, and we are all strict vegetarians on a Thursday. Despite the criticism we sometimes receive, our family has found a way to make 'Unity in Diversity' a reality in our home.

But, regardless of whether one is Hindu, Muslim or Christian, our family, like many others, has suffered our share of pain…

My son was 9 years old when the two of us travelled to India together. I had waited seven years for a child, and he was my pride and joy. He celebrated his birthday while at the ashram and, as was custom at the time, we were permitted to take a tray of sweets to darshan. I felt my son was too little to hold the tray of sweets himself so, as we sat waiting for Swami, I decided to hold the tray on his behalf. But Swami ignored me and simply walked past us. He began to speak to people around us, but just ignored me. Someone then suggested that I give the tray to my son, which I did. Immediately, Swami went right up to my son, and took a handful of his sweets which He then threw into the crowd as a blessing. But even as He did this, Swami looked directly at me. As if to say, *"Did you think I did not know it was your son's birthday?!"* My face beamed with joy that day. And my heart was full.

But, nine years ago, my precious son took his own life, at the age of 32.

If you lose the most important thing in your life, what do you do?

My son was married to a Hindu and we therefore observed the Hindu funeral rites with utmost discipline, including cremating his body and scattering his ashes in the ocean. Basheer maintained a strict fast and never left the house until the full 13 day ceremony had been concluded. On the day of the final prayer, Basheer was sitting on the couch, a father broken to pieces by the loss of his only son. Suddenly, vibuthi began to rain

down upon him... ! It lasted for about a minute, but at the end of that minute, there was approximately one cup of hot vibuthi all over my husband. Swami's vibuthi had just showered down, out of nowhere. For me, that was Swami's way of telling us that He was with us, that our son was with Him, and that He would give us the strength to get through the darkest time of our life. Losing my son changed my perspective on life. Now, whenever I can, I try and serve others. And when I go on holiday, I usually choose a cruise, because it helps me feel closer to my son.

As for Basheer, Swami has been looking after him for the last 30 years. In 1995, when Basheer first visited Prashanthi for the World Conference, he used to hide and smoke. One day, he was sitting in the 3rd row at darshan, when Swami came right up to him and said: **"Do you want a match?"** Basheer put his head down in shame. He knew exactly what Swami was referring to, but he hoped that Swami would just walk on. Instead, Swami continued, **"I am talking to you. Do you want a match?"** Unable to avoid the question, my husband just shook his head sheepishly.

In February this year, at the age of 54, Basheer suffered a massive heart attack. The doctors didn't know whether he would make it, and he was referred to a professor to perform the complicated quadruple bypass that was needed. I was filled with fear and consulted a pundit to read Basheer's fortune. After a few minutes of silent reading, the old pundit closed the book, and told me simply, *"Go home and pray."* Of course, my fear grew tenfold! The morning of the surgery, a dear friend who is a Sai devotee, visited Basheer in the ICU and prayed for him. He took a few minutes to do this, and all the while the professor waited patiently. This was the same professor who had said to me: "*I am not God. I am only a doctor. I would recommend that you pray.*" After the 7-hour operation, this same professor said the following to me: "*We lost your husband on the table. He was gone for a time. But for reasons unknown, he came back. I believe it was those morning prayers by your friend that reached God.*"

I know that our Sai devotee friend was praying to Swami that morning. And I am ever so grateful. I have known Swami for the last 35 years. Every Thursday, I light an agarbathi and I pray to Him.

But when we visited Thailand recently, we also visited a Buddhist Temple and we prayed there as well. If we all can go to a funeral together, why can't we pray together? God is everywhere. And He is also within us. Whatever Name we use to call Him, He hears us.

DOREEN (57) & BASHEER (54) SHAIK
VERULAM, DURBAN

90. A WATCH-FUL ENCOUNTER

During the early 2000s, we, as the Durban region of the Sai organisation, actively propagated the message of unity among different faiths. As part of this initiative, we sought representation from the Muslim community to join our programmes.

One day, I visited a fellow Sai devotee at Ajmeri Arcade, where he ran a business offering book exchanges and photocopying services. My initial purpose for visiting was to have my watch fixed at the repair shop that shared the premises. However, as fate would have it, our conversation turned toward finding a Muslim group to join our initiative.

Together, we began discussing potential Muslim contacts and turned to the telephone directory, which was still in use in those days! We began to search for a gentleman who we shall call Mr MS.

Just then, as if guided by a Higher Power, a tall, lean man walked in to make a photocopy. When I looked up, something felt familiar… I hesitated for a moment… before asking, *"Are you Mr MS?"* Indeed, he was!

I believe that this was not a mere coincidence — it was a divine incidence, orchestrated by God Himself, in support of our efforts to promote unity of faiths. Mr MS went on to sing at our regional Akhanda Bhajans and embraced the Sai organisation and its seva programmes.

I left the repair shop that day, with more than just a fixed wristwatch. I left with the conviction that if we are vigilant with watching our W-words, A-actions, T-thoughts, C-character, and H-heart, the ultimate Watchman will compress Time itself to ensure that all humanity eventually recognises the One behind the many.

RONNIE RAO, 70
RESERVOIR HILLS, DURBAN

"Religion is a personal encounter of the individual with the Supreme.
Do not unsettle anyone's faith. God is One.
The religion that leads man to God is also one.
Each one comes from God, is of God, is He Himself.
Each individual is a lovely flower in the garden of Allah.
We judge by appearances; God gazes into the heart.
We applaud outer acts; God sees the interior motives." [41]

"All names are mine. I am also the nameless one.
There is no atheist at all, for even those who deny God, do love something or someone, do seek peace and joy. That Love is God, that peace is God, that Joy is God." [42]

OM SRI SAI SAKALA SAMSAYA HARAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Destroys all Doubts

91. THE TAMING OF A REVOLUTIONARY

Growing up, I would confuse spirituality with religion. I considered religion the 'opiate of the masses' and 'divinity' non-existent. My home was frequented by revolutionaries, philosophers, theorists and critical thinkers who, together with my experiences in apartheid South Africa, came to shape my thinking. I grew into a highly critical and rebellious teenager whose beliefs at times ventured to atheism. I was also completely unaware that I needed grounding, direction, and enlightenment.

In our home, we observed Hindu traditions. However, my parents were quite liberal in their outlook, so when I announced that I was going to attend the local Zionist gatherings and required a white outfit with a green cross on the 'doek', they took it in their stride, as they did with many of my ideas. I went to Christian Sunday school, and Tamil school, and I prayed with Hindus, Buddhists, Zionists, the Shembe, and Muslims, in churches, mosques, temples, community halls, gardens, anywhere and everywhere. Let's just say I practiced my own version of universalism, but without knowing it.

I first heard of Sai Baba from my Greenwood Park community where I even visited a home in which His ashes and amrit had materialised. But, when devotees would return from this home in the evening after Thursday satsangs, it would amuse me no end when a friend would don a white sheet and hang from a tree lying in wait for them! So, in short, my life moved at a merry, prank-filled pace. And a journey to Swami was most unlikely.

I guess somewhere deep inside of me, I knew that motherhood was not going to come naturally. It also wasn't on my list of priorities at the time. Strangely, it's when you can't have something, that you want it most. So in 1998, when a routine check-up led to a diagnosis of 4th stage endometriosis, childbearing suddenly shot up on my list of priorities. The next 6 years saw me enduring 9 operations, endless procedures, egg harvestings, pokings and proddings, and Zoladex injections (which are administered directly through the abdomen into the uterus). After continuous and intense pain, not to mention a great many disappointments, I decided to take back control of my life.

A friend – let's call her S – suggested I consult a clairvoyant named Betty. The sceptic in me thought, well a fool and her money… but I went anyway! Betty's walls were adorned with pictures of mystics, archangels, Christ etc. But one image in particular caught my attention. While I did not recognize the image, it seemed vaguely familiar. Betty proclaimed that my life was about to change. I was going to receive enlightenment from a guru whose ashram I would visit by this time next year. What she said sounded so outlandish that, at some point, I tuned out. Later, when I told S about my receiving enlightenment, we both fell on each other laughing, before drowning our sorrows in copious amounts of coffee. However, the image on the wall stayed with me…

In the meantime, my life partner, Paddy had taken his car to a panel beater - let's call him G. G had extracted a considerable advance payment from Paddy which he could ill afford. G evidently had squandered the money and was now giving Paddy the run around. So, determined to extract his pound of flesh, Paddy decided to pay G a visit, accompanied by a chrome- coated 9mm Parabellum. G was so alarmed by this raging bull of a man and his gun, that he suggested they both visit someone that could help. Assuming that this someone would help settle the debt, Paddy allowed G to take him to what turned out to be the home of a pious Sai devotee. This uncle not only did not know why Paddy was there, but he was also no money-bags. On the contrary, he was known to wear a Sarva Dharma sandwich board at public events and was probably the perfect person to diffuse G's volatile quandary. The uncle and his wife welcomed Paddy and G warmly and suggested that they pray together before offering them lunch. G eventually excused himself, no mention was made of the debt, and Mr. Parabellum did not make an appearance. Whilst we make light of this incident, it is not lost on me

that it could have ended very tragically. Paddy and the uncle eventually became good friends and it was he who referred Paddy to Thursday satsangs at Knightsbridge College.

When I returned from my visit to Betty, Paddy told me that he would like us to pray together, much like the couple he had just met. I thought he was smoking his socks! At that point, I probably prayed at most two times in the year, Diwali and Puratassi, and that too at the behest of my mother. But that Thursday, and on Paddy's instruction that I should dress conservatively, I donned the only long green dress I owned, and off we went to our first Sai satsang. My critical mind was on high alert, and I was determined not to be 'converted'. However, as I sat down, something deep within me began to stir, followed by the feeling of waves washing over me. Surprisingly, I was able to relax and experience what I later came to understand as 'bliss'. Needless to say, Paddy and I returned.

Truth has always been the cornerstone of my existence. What I came to see and learn through the Sai centre, including the 9-point code of conduct, was simple and achievable. I process all responses on the basis of either love or fear. With Swami, God is Love. There is no threat, no experiencing the wrath of God, no complicated rituals, no predictions from backyard priests, and no need for exorcisms of any kind. There was no judgement or condemnation - only acceptance. I found it all liberating, and I loved the inclusivity of all religions. It blew my mind that we also sang in isiZulu. Here was an organization that had complete understanding of its location and the concept of universalism; that was not only accepting of all humans but served all of humanity. When I first heard the word 'seva', I thought it was a mispronunciation! As a child, my father had instilled in us the importance of service to humanity, so I really liked that outward focus. In fact, I came to be in awe of what the organization was achieving at a global scale. As for Sathya Sai Baba the Being, while we prayed to the God in Him, He was urging us to recognize that God resides in all of us; and that our journey was to achieve this realization in ourselves.

It was a revelation to me, and yet so simple. Therein lies the solution to all of the world's problems! This was my tribe. I just fitted in. And I never left.

As Swami worked His magic with me, quite unexpectedly (read: Swami orchestrated) an opportunity via my workplace presented itself. In an unheard of assignment, I was dispatched to New Delhi to recruit students which wasn't even my area of responsibility. The trip was epic. From New Delhi, I made my way to Swami who was at Whitefield. My first view of Him was on the balcony of His home as He came down the stairs. Crying is not a sensation I am accustomed to, but I felt a sort of out-of-body experience – like my eyes were watering but my brain was detached, and silent. I was moved. A life-time of tears poured forth. And somehow, I felt cleansed.

I had two bliss-filled days with no pain and I made the best of it. But then the endometriosis cramping began, followed by the pain. Soon, I was out of my mind with pain. I had words with Swami – angry, tearful words. I issued ultimatums and threats. For an entire night and morning, I suffered. As I sat outside trying to regain my sanity, a lady named Devi from Australia offered to stop by with some ointment. I had taken 3 painkillers with no effect in the last 12 hours, but she was bringing ointment! Still, the well-meaning Sai devotee came by with a small tin of menthol cream. She rubbed it on me and, lo and behold, the pain disappeared. I could not believe it. Just like that - gone! I was able to have a bath and join the Australians for afternoon darshan. When I sat down in the second row, I could have been in the roof, I was so happy! I bowed my head and thanked Swami, before asking for forgiveness for all the mean things I had said during my meltdown. It was during those moments with my head bowed that I became aware of a buzz in the hall. Devi whispered, *"He's looking at you!"* I picked my head up and opened my eyes, only to see Swami standing about two metres in front of me. We made direct eye contact for what must have been a split second. Then… I am really not sure what happened.

It felt like a power surge through my body. I was immobilized. I sat in that position until I became aware of the sound of sweeping. When I looked around me, the hall was empty, but for a lady sweeping at the far end. I got

up and walked slowly towards my hotel. There, I saw Devi and her friends having coffee. As they could see I was in deep meditation, they didn't want to disturb me, and so had left. But now they were going to visit a lady who had in her possession one of Swami's manifested lingams and they invited me to join them. On entering the lady's house, I saw a photograph on the wall. It looked familiar…

Suddenly it hit me. It was the same photo that I had seen on Betty's wall. The lady explained that, unlike the usual artists' impressions, this was a rare and actual photo of Shirdi Sai Baba. All the pieces of my life's puzzle began to fall into place. I asked her if I could make a photocopy of the photo, to which she simply replied, "*It will come*." (which was probably a good thing because I had no idea how I would find a photocopier at that hour!) But at this point, my brain was free-wheeling downhill at top speed and the brakes were off! All things were possible. So it completely blew my mind when, the next morning, an Australian woman knocked on my door and handed me the very same photo of Shirdi Sai Baba. Only, it was a smaller version, but an actual photo, and not a photocopy. *(Refer: Image q)*

At 2am, I sat in the International Departure Lounge, eyes closed, and thanking Swami for everything, including the mysterious ointment, because I never felt better. As I was doing so, I heard a strange clicking sound. I looked up only to see the flight noticeboard, rotating and flapping. As I looked at it, it went from blank to - SAI SAYS SA - then blank again. For me, that was the culmination of many incredible experiences. I screamed out loud, like a woman possessed (fortunately there was no one around to witness it).

Life is full of challenges. But I like who I have become. Swami has made me calmer. I choose my battles carefully, and I am more measured in my responses. With Swami's Wisdom and Guidance, I continue to relentlessly pursue and expose the truth, wherever possible.

Divinity resides within all of us.
Our journey is to realise the divinity within us, and to recognise the divinity in others.
When we do so, conflict is non-existent.

INDUMATHIE MOODLEY (64) & PADDY SOOKDEO (65)
DURBAN NORTH

92. CRACKING THROUGH DISBELIEF

Aunty Paddy was a big woman, who wore a proportionally big red dot in the middle of her forehead. For me, who was then a curious and energetic 9-year-old, she was larger than life in so many ways. In the tiny little outbuilding where she lived in the community of Rylands, amazing things were happening in the early 1970's. Magical roht would form in a tea, ash would appear in heaps, and oil and honey would ooze out of pictures of a God she referred to as Sai Baba. She would play bhajans on a tape deck, and make the most delicious prasad while telling us jaw-dropping stories about Sai Baba. Naturally, all the children were drawn to her, and my sister and I loved running her errands. Though her home was small, her heart was huge, and the crowds of curious onlookers soon began to grow and overflow from her kitchen into her yard - all drawn to the magic of Sai.

My own family was actively involved in the Western Cape's first Siva Alayam Temple where God was worshipped as Ganesha, Shiva and Muruga. Unsurprisingly, they were dismissive of the 'events' taking place at Aunty Paddy's house. But the fairy dust, or shall we say, the vibuthi, had already been sprinkled on me, because young as I was, I continued to attend satsang at Aunty Paddy's house regularly. This was how I was first called to

Sai Baba. And as those who have been called will know, regardless of where your life takes you, He never lets you go.

The years passed and after graduating from Rylands High school, I had to leave for KZN to study teaching at Springfield College in Asherville, which was the only college available to Indians during apartheid South Africa. Imagine my surprise when I discovered a group of students holding Sai bhajans every Tuesday in the Springfield auditorium. I immediately joined them, and as I was living at the hostel, I was also able to attend the Thursday satsang at the Asherville Sai Centre. Looking back, I am very grateful that Swami always kept me close to Him.

Then, once I had graduated and a few years after being married to my husband Ivan, Swami called again. In 1994, we bought our first home in Rosehill, and the group that came to render bhajans in our new house turned out to be from the Centre Road Sai Centre. Once again, I immediately joined the centre, where I was fortunate to experience many little miracles such as the sprinkling of vibuthi on a cake that I had baked for Swami's birthday celebrations.

But I think my most 'alarming' miracle, was the one I experienced at the Grasmere Road ashram in Silverglen. Drawn to the place from all the stories I had heard, I took a group of three ladies including a mother and her 'troublesome' teenage son, to visit the ashram for ourselves. As the five of us stood in the room praying and looking at all the phenomena, I suddenly felt a heavy presence and heard an earth-shattering sound, which was followed instantaneously by a shower of sugar candy, and pink and white almond sweets. No matter how hard we tried, we could not explain it - It was truly unbelievable. I took the sweets home to Ivan, but he was unmoved. He seemed to think I was wasting my time with these things. Until, one day, Ivan had a turning point of his own....

While my husband would always attend weekly satsang with me, he was admittedly somewhat distant from it all. One evening, he was helping a group of men carry the new white life-size murthi of Swami, made entirely from concrete, from the garage, down a flight of precarious steps, to the centre's shrine. It was a back-breaking task with many giving up along the way. But Ivan and a few of the men managed to get it down the steps, when they heard a loud cracking noise... They thought the statue had broken. When they eventually put it down at the shrine, Ivan looked around for a broken Hand or something else that had cracked off. Instead, what he found was a shower of sugar candy, which had evidently 'cracked' through the air, before landing all around the hardworking men.

There was now no turning back for the both of us. From that point onwards, our journey with Swami has continued on a firm and uninterrupted footing, with Him as our only destination. Both our children are also on the Sai path, which makes us very proud parents.

I have felt that Swami has drawn me closer to Him through all the phases of my life, which He continues to run, completely. Every day of my life is a miracle, that I am ever so grateful for.

KRISHNI (61) & IVAN (61) PHEKUN
DURBAN NORTH

93. WITH HIS FEET LIKE BUTTER, I MELTED

1980 marked the close of my schooling career. With matric exams done and dusted, I knew I had passed, but I also knew that I needed a good pass in order to be accepted at the University of Durban-Westville to study social science. Those anxieties however were soon surpassed by great excitement - my father was planning a visit to Prashanthi Nilayam! As my older sister and I were both drawn to Shirdi Sai Baba, we asked my dad if we could please go to Shirdi first, before going to Puttaparthi. He was reluctant, fearing that we would not manage the difficult journey from Mumbai to Shirdi. But the two of us managed to twist his arm.

On arrival in Mumbai however, I contracted mumps, and had to be quarantined in the hotel. Being in a lot of pain, my mum would rub vibuthi on my neck and give it to me in water to drink. Fortunately, after a week, I was able to embark on the journey to Shirdi, in a rickety bus that had no windows. The journey was cold, bumpy, and long. On arrival, we were taken to a roadside restaurant to freshen up, before lining up for morning arthi. Not knowing what to expect, the four of us simply went with the flow and joined the fast-moving queues. When we eventually witnessed the arthi, it was a truly beautiful experience, which I thanked Shirdi Sai Baba for profusely. It was a visit that was well worth all the trial and tribulation.

After the arduous trip back to our hotel in Mumbai, we flew out the next day to Bangalore. As in Shirdi, we did not know what to expect on arriving in Puttaparthi. And as we were a week late, and with it being Christmas, there was no accommodation at all. My father tried explaining to the officials that he had brought his two young daughters for the first time to see Swami. Eventually they offered us a room in the West block. But this turned out to be an incomplete building, with no windows and rubble on the floor. Despite my dad being insistent that we go and book a hotel outside the ashram, my sister and I simply covered our faces with our scarves and swept out the rubble with a piece of cardboard. Then, we placed our sarees on the floor, and made pillows with our clothes. That night, we covered ourselves with our shawls and attempted to sleep. It seems that it was not only our parents who were impressed with our resilience and our willingness to rough it out. For, having clearly passed a 'test', we were allocated a comfortable room the very next morning.

Unbeknown to us however, Swami had evidently been 'waiting' for us. You see, a long-standing devotee and seasoned tour leader had already arrived at the ashram with his group. He was aware that our family was also expected at the ashram, but he could not understand why we had not yet arrived. Everyday, he would ask Swami for an interview for the South Africans, and everyday Swami would say, **"Wait. One more family."** We arrived in Prashanthi on 24th December, just in time to enjoy the Christmas programme. It was so exciting to see Swami in such close proximity. To me, Swami came across as a dear friend. On 26th December, the tour leader once again made representations at darshan for an interview with Swami for the South Africans. This time, Swami said, **"Come!"** We felt blessed and honoured when we realised that we were the family the Lord had been waiting for.

In the interview room, Swami made us all feel very calm and relaxed. The first thing He said was, "**Smile!"** As you can imagine, this removed all tension in the room. He then caught sight of a somewhat round lady struggling to sit in the corner. With a glint in His Eye, Swami looked at us and said, **"Extra luggage, less comfort."** We giggled softly, not knowing how to behave in front of Him. At this stage, I was confused as to whether Swami was the Lord of the Universe. To me, He looked too human. Swami then chastised a man in the group interview saying that he had a very bad temper with his wife. But then Swami proceeded to materialise a green stone ring for this man. Even though this took place right in front of us, it happened too fast, so I was not convinced. My 18-year-old young mind was constantly questioning and persistently in doubt.

Swami then called my father and three other men for a private interview. My father later reported to us how Swami had looked at him and said: **"Came four times. First time interview. Very patient man."** It was indeed my father's fourth trip to see Swami and his first interview. And those of us who knew him, can attest to what a patient man he was.

But then, it was the ladies' turn, with Swami pointing my mum, sister and I, to the inner room. In my mind, all I could think was: *"Gosh! This is intimidating. What now?!"*
There, Swami looked firstly at my mum, and asked, **"And how are you?"**
"My daughter, Swami. She is unwell," my mum replied, referring to my eldest sister back in South Africa.
"Don't worry. I know. I will take care of her."
Swami then turned to my sister and asked, **"Marriage?"**
"Yes Swami," she replied. After a short exchange about the appropriate date for her wedding, Swami then said, **"Don't worry. Good man."**

When Swami turned to finally look at me, my heart began to race.
"Also marriage for you," He said.
"No Swami," I replied emphatically, completely ignoring the fact that I was already dating Shunnon who had even accompanied me to my matric dance. But of course, nothing escapes the Avatar. With an all-knowing smile, He gently asked me, **"Worried?"**
"Yes Swami," I replied. *"My matric results."*
"Don't worry. Good results. Go to college."
Those were Swami's exact words but, for some reason, I didn't give it too much weight. In my own mind, I was going to *university* to study social science.

At the end of the interview, we were all blessed with padanamaskar. As I prostrated to touch Swami's Feet, I was amazed at how soft they were to the touch. They actually felt like butter! But that 'butter' transmitted a current through me that was nothing short of electrifying. And it seems, I too was just like butter, for in that instant, all my doubts melted away. Completely.

This was God. It was a feeling that would remain with me for the rest of my life.

Swami continues to this day to guide and care for my eldest sister. My second sister did indeed get married, to a good brother-in-law. As for me, despite my stubborn desire to go to university and be with my friends, when I actually realised that the Springfield Training College was down the road from our home, and I could walk to it, I chose to study teaching, at the *college*, simply based on my convenience. And I too got married – to Shunnon.

Looking back on my life, these would all turn out to be perfect decisions for me. Shunnon and I have been married for 37 years, and teaching was my life's calling. I completed my studies in 1983 earning myself a Diploma in Teaching with a specialisation in Physical Education.

Shortly thereafter, my father organised a trip to India for about 28 family members. In order to include me on this family adventure, my dad took a loan on the proviso that I would pay it back from my first year's salary as a teacher. It was this amazing trip that saw aunties and uncles, young and old, go from Kanyakumari in the south to Kashmir in the north. No prizes for guessing where this magical trip ended - yes, at Prashanthi Nilayam. What we didn't realise however was that a Balvikas conference was being held at the ashram in December 1983. This was the conference where Swami initiated the Balvikas programme. Within our family group there were 8 secular school teachers, including myself who was just about to start my teaching career. We were all permitted to participate in this sacred conference where the seeds of my passion for Balvikas were planted.

The bottom line is that Swami has a plan for each and every one of us. As insignificant as those Divine Instructions were at the time – *"Also marriage for you"* and *"Go to college"* - He knew all along the road I would travel and how much fulfilment I would derive from the family I would raise, and from watching scores of young children blossom over the years. There is not a single word uttered by the avatar that does not have great relevance for us.

I owe my late parents, SC and Seela Naicker, my utmost gratitude.
Going before us, they lit up our path.
A path that would only lead to Swami,
The One with Feet, soft like butter,
But whose steps are always firm.
And always closing the distance,
Between Him and I.

PITHAM TULSIRAM, 62
UMHLANGA RIDGE, DURBAN

Dear !

Be like the star which never wavers from the crescent but is fixed in steady faith.

When the sun is over your head, there will be no shadow. So too when faith is steady in your heart, it should not cast any shadow of doubt.

With Blessings
Baba[43]

OM SRI SAI SARVA SIDDHI PRADAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who Grants all Accomplishments and Success

94. WAITING FOR THAT AHA MOMENT

My journey with Swami began in the early 70s at the age of 6. I used to attend Sai bhajans at the home of a relative, motivated only by the prasad offered at the end. My parents would not accompany me, with my dad going so far as to question how a human being could be revered as God. A few years later we moved home, and my prasad sessions ended.

In the late 80's, my mom was introduced to Swami through a colleague. She would return home from work and share stories of Swami's miracles, eventually placing a picture of Swami at our prayer altar. However, by that stage, I seem to have inherited my late dad's scepticism, and so disregarded my mum's newfound faith.

It would be my husband who would catalyse the beginning of my real journey with Swami, in the early 90's, when he suggested that we attend bhajans at the Platt Drive Sai Centre in Isipingo. Though we attended regularly, and while I really enjoyed the bhajans and discourses, I found that I was still missing a connection with Swami, what I called an 'Aha' moment, that would strengthen our bond. I shared this feeling with a fellow devotee who suggested that I read more about Swami and His teachings.

But as I did this, I found myself praying for my own materialisations, because I believed that these were a sign that Swami was listening to our prayers. Needless to say, I experienced no such materialisations. Slowly however, my focus began to shift from Swami's miracles to Swami's teachings. It was here that I found a growing magnetism to Swami, one that I cannot explain, but for which I am ever so grateful. For it was only through the strength and faith I derived from His teachings, that I was able to navigate the challenging years that were still to come…as a parent.

With Swami's Grace, my husband and I were blessed with two wonderful children. But as with all children, they are each unique, having entered this world with their own special gifts, and needing to chart a course only they can travel. Both my children were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder for which they were prescribed medication.

For my daughter Sandrika, the side effects of the medication were really severe. So by the age of 9, I had to stop the medication and rely solely on natural supplements and on working closely with her school to ensure her academic progress. Sandrika was diligent and worked extremely hard. In 2011, she completed her 9 years as a Balvikas student. At her graduation ceremony held at the Newlands Sai Centre, the Programme Director announced that all the certificates of the graduating students were put into envelopes before being left at an altar for Swami's blessings. And in true Swami style, all the envelopes had indeed been blessed with vibuthi, which in turn, had been gathered and placed inside the respective envelopes. However, one particular envelope had been blessed with more than just vibuthi – there was also a picture, clearly meant for only one of them. The Programme Director then said to the students: *"Remember that whatever trials and tribulations you may have experienced or will experience, Swami is always there protecting and guiding you."*

At the end of the ceremony, all the students were excitedly opening their envelopes, all except for Sandrika. When questioned, she shrugged and replied that she didn't believe her envelope had the picture. Imagine her amazement when she did eventually open her envelope, and found a little picture of Jesus and Swami nestled amidst the vibuthi and her certificate. From a young age, Sandrika has always felt a sense of ease and comfort with the Christian faith, enjoying Christian faith-based movies, and really connecting with the worship songs. Only Swami would know this, so I firmly believe that the picture was Swami's confirmation that He is always guiding her, through whatever Form she chooses. *(Refer: Image r)*

Sandrika went on to matriculate in 2013 achieving A's and B's for all her subjects, followed by the successful completion of a B.Soc.Sc. degree from the University of Cape Town. She is presently a yoga teacher, a Specialist Wellness Counsellor, and a budding entrepreneur living her life mindfully.

Similarly, my son Sachin was also diagnosed with ADHD, by a group of professionals who recommended that he be transferred from mainstream schooling to a 'special school for children with serious learning difficulties' at the age of 7. It was their professional opinion that he would not even cope in a remedial school. I remember the day I received their diagnostic report so vividly. It was a day when I was completely overcome with emotion.

I prayed fervently to Swami and placed my son at His Lotus Feet. Once again, with faith, and with the right academic support orchestrated by Swami, Sachin passed primary school comfortably. He also became an excellent swimmer and was awarded a bursary to attend Crawford College La Lucia for his secondary education. While his high school years were not without challenges, Sachin stood strong and enjoyed many accolades, including representing SA in swimming in Angola. Sachin has successfully completed his Matric and is currently studying for a B. Com Accounting degree.

As a mother, if anyone had told me when my children were little that they would achieve success, I would likely not have believed them. But now, knowing the hurdles they have had to overcome, and watching them grow into confident young adults who always try to practise Swami's teachings – this is my Aha moment! One of many that have peppered my life through the Grace of Sai.

Being a mother to these two special children has taught me some important lessons of my own:

- There will always be challenges. Being a Sai devotee does not exempt you from pain or difficulties. All we have is the guarantee that Swami will hold our hand over life's speed bumps.

- Being a Sai devotee is not about experiencing materialisations. It's about having faith. Rather than putting too much faith in the professionals, we must increase our faith in the Divine Teacher. Even when I faltered, Swami was there to hold me up.

- Overcoming life's challenges takes place one slow step at a time. Fortunately for them, Sandrika and Sachin began attending Balvikas when they were a mere 6 years old. It was only because of the teachings of our beloved Swami that they were equipped to rise above the labels that were placed upon them, to defy the odds, and to have a resolute 'can-do' attitude always. No matter how difficult or how long the road may be, we have to keep moving forward, armoured by His teachings.

These have been my Aha moments – moments that didn't come in a flash, or even overnight. They came slowly, but ever so surely, guiding my family and I to where we are today. I wish to extend my gratitude to Swami for all the blessings that He has bestowed and continues to shower on us.

MANDY CHETTY, 57
GLEN HILLS, DURBAN

95. MY BESTIE

I was one of the unfortunate 10-year-olds who had to wear braces. Going to the orthodontist to have my braces inserted was an awfully scary experience. As I sat on that intimidating reclined chair waiting, I noticed an A5 picture of Swami right above the door. He was smiling down on me. In that moment, I knew I was not alone. With my fear removed, I simply focused on Swami's presence, holding my hand, every step of the way. Every subsequent appointment, particularly when they needed to tighten the braces, went smoothly thereafter, and I was never afraid. As a child, this was the first time I realised that I was not alone. And that I have a best friend in my dear Swami.

In 2010, I was blessed to participate in South Africa's Ubuntu production. But I felt especially blessed because, unlike other children, I took part in more than one item. I started by participating in one dance item, but as we practiced, a few boys and girls were selected for another dance, and thereafter three girls, including myself, were chosen to do a narration. While at the time I did not think much of it, it was only as I grew up that I realised how privileged and blessed I was not only to dance but also to 'speak' to our dear Lord. Those moments in the performance, when I looked at and made a physical connection with Swami, are so strong and unforgettable, that I carry them with me every second of my life. When the production was over, I cried so much from all the emotion which, as a 9-year-old, I could not understand. Now, I know it was simply because of the love - the Pure Love emanating from our Divine Swami.

As I grew up, Swami became my best friend, my 'bestie' with whom I share everything. Yes, like typical besties, there are times when we even argue, and I can feel him laughing at me. Like when it came to deciding on my career. At 18, I was still utterly clueless. After a year of studying Information Technology, I finally settled on teaching. Swami knew all along that this was the career meant for me, because I have since developed a passion for it (except it would be nice, if sometimes, He spoke a little more clearly!)

I started teaching Balvikas at the age of 20 while still completing my B.Ed. degree. I am currently in my final year which, a few months ago, required a practical assessment. With it being my final assessment, I was completely stressed out, because I wanted to achieve the best mark for myself. Days before the assessment, I had sleepless nights ensuring my file was absolutely perfect. I did not speak to Swami during this time – let's just call it a stress blackout! Finally, the day arrived, and I had to take a deep breath before walking in for the assessment. But, during the discussion, I realised that my assessor was actually a Sai devotee too! I was shocked, but then also instantly calmed. Because I realised that Swami had been there all the time. He had never left me alone. This was His way of reminding me of His presence.

Dear Swami, you will forever remain in my heart, as my BFF – my best friend forever.

SAIESHA PARAMANAND, 23
DURBAN NORTH

My dear children

Remember something. Enjoy every single second, yet know your priorities. You can do everything in life with good time management and will. You can achieve great feats. Make the most of your time.

Remember that life is like a highway. There are all kinds of signs and indications which show you the way. Many roads can lead to the same destination. [44]

Grace is the sunlight which will ripen the fruit; sadhana is the sap which rises from the earth. Both are needed by the tree in order that it may yield fruit.

With Blessings

Baba[45]

OM SRI SAI LOKA NATHAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is the Lord and Transformer of all Worlds

96. YES

Transformation is a very powerful word.

For better or, for worse.

Shakespeare once wrote, *"Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments. Love is not love that bends with the remover to remove."* Swami's love is such. Unwavering, unflinching, supreme love. A commitment to our transformation. A sacred covenant. A vow never to leave our side, aptly captured in these words:

"When you said "Yes" to Me you gave up the right to be like everyone else. That is why you draw experiences to yourself that will cleanse yourself of that which does not fit who you are. Over, and over, again, and again until I make you see that the past no longer works. I challenge you and tempt you every day with your past, so that you may see that the past is ultimate delusion. When you said "Yes" to Me you gave Me your body, your thoughts, your actions. When they don't suit the new you, the uncomfortableness is unbearable. It is so EVERY time until you realise this fully; then and only then will you completely give up desire. For this is the only way man will learn. Very seldom does he learn by quiet reminders. Man's desires and pitfalls are placed there so that I may do my work. When you give up totally, then the temptations will fade. I will never give up on you. Every slip will become harder to bear and less easy to remedy. You will tire of your foolishness because I love you and whether or not completely aware of it, you did say "Yes"."

- Sathya Sai Baba [46]

My transformation didn't come with quiet reminders. It was loud. In this lifetime, a loveless marriage, messy separation and brutal divorce left me almost entirely broken. Moving back into my parents' home in Durban after sixteen years of living in Johannesburg, was a direct response to the fears and insecurities of an embattled subservient housewife, and a shattered person who had lived a confused life. In Durban I became an active member of the Durban North Sai Center. Every Thursday when the lights went out and the power point came up with the words for the bhajans displayed on the screen, I would sit silently ingesting the positive vibrations. Tears would stream down my face. At first I couldn't sing. I was glad it was dark and that nobody could see me. I just sat quietly. I felt comforted by the bhajans. It was my fix for the rest of the week. Soon the tears lessened. I started joining in the singing. The devotees were kind. I found myself volunteering for the seva activities and eventually I was also giving spiritual talks. And for the most part, I was picking up the pieces. But the lull did not last for long.

Karma held my hand tightly. My other hand was held even more tightly by my vasanas; negative tendencies and habits driven by the ego. I berated myself. My ego was big in its smallness. I was a failure. No matter what I did, I was never good enough. Not smart enough. Not beautiful enough. Not strong enough. Not thin enough. Not enough. My internal narrative was negative. Demons lurking dangerously in the dark recesses of the mind showed up. The churning began again.

Until one fine day, I was lying on the floor in my home, utterly alone, in a puddle of tears. I had finally reached rock bottom. All the spiritual talks I gave at the Sai centre had come to naught. All the mantra recitations had not left me with persistent change. I couldn't figure out why I was still so broken. Tears were winding their way like rivers down my face. I pressed my cheek to the cold tiled floor and stared into space. My heart ached. I couldn't sink any further. I had given up. I surrendered, *"I don't know who I really am. Swami you have got to help me."*

My cheek was still to the floor when all of a sudden my focus shifted. In the tiny gap between rock bottom and total inertia, was divine grace. Divine Grace is inexplicable. One never knows when it will be granted. I suppose the sincerity of my yearning qualified me. I peeled myself off the floor, dried my tears, sat on my favourite chair in front of Swamis life-size photo frame and in one superfluous stroke I resolved that I would not stop enquiring until I found out who I really am, or die trying. I am not entirely sure who decided that, come what may, I would get up at 3am everyday and contemplate upon this question, *"Who am I?"* for 49 days. Buddha meditated for 49 days, and so would I, obviously. The internal Guru had been invoked. My sadhana consisted of asking myself the question, *"Who am I?"* and then waiting silently for the answer. After a few weeks it miraculously expanded to doing yogic breathing exercises followed by the light meditation, Phyllis Krystal exercises, the Rudram and the Surya Namaskar. I was beginning to get excited to get up. It felt so good. It felt right. I felt put right.

Make no mistake, the tests came flying at me. Every day something happened to make it more difficult for me to wake up. My transformation was not easy. These were opportunities for me to rise to the challenge and to prove my worth to myself. It seemed Swami was the ultimate task master, but Swami was also ready to wait for me, forever. You might be wondering what happened after Day 49. Well even before the 49th day was over I began to feel a deep internal confidence take root in my heart. I couldn't adequately explain it even if I tried. All I knew is that I became aware of the subtle power of Love, and I knew that nothing in the outer world, was more important than my inner world. In fact, I came to the realization that nothing was real. I felt no fear. I felt LOVE. The capital letters kind of LOVE. True Love. A love that is attached to nothing, but present everywhere.

My world had changed. I knew that I would never be the same again. I didn't get the ring, or the chain, or the earrings. Swami didn't manifest vibhuti for me or appear to me. That was not important. What I got was transformation of the heart. Because after all, whether or not I was completely aware of it, I did say "*Yes*".

SUREKA SINGH, 52
DURBAN NORTH

97. THE GREAT WIREPULLER

As newly-weds, my husband Bharath and I would observe all the traditional Hindu events at the local Vishnu Temple in Kenville. During the 1995 Krishna Asthmee celebrations, I sat at the temple listening to the bhajans being rendered, and began to wonder who it was that was singing so beautifully. Upon learning that the soulful group was actually the Kenville Sai Centre, I immediately resolved to join their Thursday bhajan sessions. I absolutely loved it. The bhajans were deeply moving, and the Sai devotees I met there, were warm and welcoming. Except… there was one problem… they were all vegetarian!

After a while, I began to feel bad about my carnivore tendencies. Truth be told, I loved my meat so much, that my family would sometimes call me a 'hog'! But the more time I spent with this group, the more uncomfortable I became with myself. One day, while praying silently at home, I said to Sai Baba, who up until now, had been nothing more than a Silent Witness to my life and quandaries: *"Can you please help me a little – maybe by giving me a bit of a kickstart?"* Shortly thereafter, a sadhana camp was organised by the centre, for which I promptly signed up. Little did I know, that in preparation for the spiritual weekend at Oakford Priory in Verulam, all participants would need to undertake a two-week disciplined regimen comprised of, amongst other things, daily Omkar, Suprabhatam, Meditation, and….. you guessed it, a completely vegetarian diet! Well, I did it! Not only did I not eat meat for those two weeks, I never ate it again. I asked for a kickstart – and He was ever so quick to oblige me.

Two years later, at a visit to my cousin's home in Newlands, my kind-hearted cousin gave me two A4 prints of Sai Baba – one was of His Face and the other of His Feet. I accepted both prints graciously, but in a dusty corner of my mind, an ungrateful thought lurked: *"Hmm. The picture of Sai Baba's face is nice, but the one of his feet looks a bit tattered."* While I am known for frequently shooting my mouth off, this was fortunately not one of those times. My shameless thought was suppressed, and the evening continued pleasantly. When we left my cousin, I took both photos and tucked them safely into the cubby of our car. Bharath and I then did a further round of visits to a hospital and to dinner, before returning home. But lo and behold, when I opened the cubby to take the photos out, there was only one photo there… You guessed it, the 'tattered' photo of Swami's feet was gone! Though I double-checked with my cousin, and searched the car over, it was never to be found. One can only conclude that either Swami took exception to my 'insult' or… that He chose to teach me, in the most clever but gentle manner, that nothing, not even a tiny, fleeting, unspoken thought… escapes Him.

So if He knows even our unspoken thoughts, how does He respond when we cry out loud to Him? Well, Swami recently decided to show me...

Simba was our 8-year-old Swiss Shepherd. He was also a part of our family, so when he got sick, we were terribly worried. Bharath took him to the SPCA, who then admitted Simba into a veterinary hospital. He was diagnosed with a blood and liver problem and just would not eat. After 5 days, and a poor prognosis, we had to bring Simba home, where I began to tend to him myself. For 2 weeks, I cooked all his favourite foods, and painstakingly tried to feed him, with no success. Simba became increasingly weak. And Bharath became increasingly convinced that the right thing to do, was for Simba to be euthanised.

But I was totally against it. I believed Simba would recover. And after all, he was our baby. However, as the days went by and there was no turnaround, Bharath issued me with an ultimatum. If there was no recovery by the long weekend, he would be taking Simba to the SPCA to be put down. I was miserable. The Thursday before the holiday, while I was reading the Sai Satcharitra, I was struck by the closing lines of chapter 22:

"God lives in all beings and creatures, whether they be serpents or scorpions. He is the Great Wirepuller of the world, and all beings, serpents, scorpions etc, obey His command. Unless He wills it, nobody can do any harm to others. The world is all dependent on Him, and no one is independent. So we should take pity and love all creatures, leave off adventurous fights and killings, and be patient. The Lord is the Protector of all."

I was now more convinced than ever. We could not put Simba down. But how could I convince my husband, who understandably, also believed that he was doing the right thing for our beloved dog? That afternoon, I found myself dreading the sound of Bharath's car returning from work. Like a mad lady, I began pacing and praying: *"Don't let them kill Simba, Swami. Please! Please, don't let them kill our Simba."* Then I put vibuthi into Simba's water bowl, and for the first time, he gulped the water down. Suddenly, I heard the car. Bharath was home. I wrung my hands with anxiety. But what could I do?

Bharath walked in and reminded me that the SPCA closes at 15h30. I realised he was coping with the situation, by being clinical. I, on the other hand, was simply not coping at all. Eventually though, I was forced to submit to the inevitable. Slowly, I went to put Brody, our Rottweiler, away in the backyard, as I feared causing a commotion when Simba was taken away. But, as I returned to Simba's kennel, I saw my precious dog… take his last breath… on his own.

My dog Simba passed peacefully. The 'Great Wirepuller' had willed the exact moment when Simba would leave us. Even though I was awash with grief for our loss, I was also totally at peace. For yet again, Swami had heard my prayer. And our Compassionate Lord responded.

Whether it's a silent prayer, an unspoken thought, or an anguished cry,
He hears us.
And He responds
For the good of us all.

SIMLA RAMCHARAN, 59
KENVILLE, DURBAN

Beings are born, they run about for a few years or hours and die, all as part of Baba's leela. This is His play and we are all fortunate puppets in His Hand.
Only He knows the role of each one of us in the play, and we have only to move about the stage, without protest, reacting perfectly, to every pull of the string.
This Loka (world) is a stage and Baba is the Director of the Play... transforming the world. [47]

OM SRI SAI BHAKTA PRIYAYA NAMAHA

I bow to the One who is Precious to Devotees

98. HE IS ALWAYS WITH US

In 2020, when COVID-19 caused a global shutdown, my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer. It was a very difficult time for us as we were in and out of hospital receiving treatment when most people wanted to be as far away from hospitals as possible. But would you believe neither my husband nor I contracted COVID, not once! That could only have been because of the Love and Mercy of our Swami – our Divine Mother who knew what we were going through, and who, to this day, continues to look after my husband.

Two years later, in 2022, Swami again demonstrated to me His Power and Might…

After retirement, my husband and I started to run a stall at the Bluff flea-market selling detergents. Every Friday we would purchase our stock from a huge complex in Silverglen, where there were lots of factory shops. When we arrived at the complex, there were already many people inside and the electric gates opened to allow us entry. We parked our bakkie in the usual spot where we could easily load the detergents onto our vehicle. But, as soon as I got out the vehicle, a man approached me. He pulled out a gun, and put the barrel right to my chest.

In a very calm voice, he commanded: *"Give me your bag."* As I handed my bag over to the large intimidating man, I began to chant, *"Sai Ram, Sai Ram, Sai Ram."* The man then pointed the gun at my husband who was still sitting in the driver's seat, and instructed him to get out of the bakkie. In my mind, I continued my silent chanting, *"Sai Ram, Sai Ram, Sai Ram."* Then, the man did something very unexpected…

He gently returned my bag to me. In it, I had a significant amount of cash with which I was meant to buy our stock. But he didn't even open the bag! Instead, he told us to put our cellphones off and to go and hide as far away from the place as possible. His words were: *"@#$% is going to happen. You better get out."* We could already see that a major robbery was underway, and several robbers were hitting people with the butt of their guns. My husband and I quietly stepped away from our bakkie, and then we began to run towards the end of the complex. Unfortunately, we couldn't leave because the entire complex was surrounded by a high fence. But we did find a horse-and-trailer and the two of us crawled under it and hid. We lay there for several minutes, silently chanting, while listening to the screams and cries of people being hurt. When the sounds eventually died down, we slowly crept out from our hiding place.

To our relief, we saw a police van entering the complex, but the robbers had already gotten away. Many people had been assaulted that morning. They were bleeding and traumatized, with all of their belongings stolen. For us however, that terrible event served only to affirm our faith in Swami. Where do you find a robber who takes your bag, knowing full well that you have come to shop, and then returns it to you moments later with the contents untouched?! What kind of robber, armed with a gun, will tell you to go and hide and keep yourself safe?! I believe that Swami entered the mind of that robber, and it was He who orchestrated the turn in events.

Swami literally saved our lives. Even our bakkie, with the keys still in the ignition, was left untouched. All I could say was, *"Thank You, my dear Lord!"* If we put our trust in Swami, our Divine Father will never ever let us down.

But I did not always understand this. I was far too attached to the Physical Form of our Swami. So, on the 24 April 2011, I was devastated…

I could not believe the news that I had just heard. Swami was our Mother, our Father, our Guru, our God - He

was everything to us. And now, He was gone. We started to cry inconsolably. And then, we made our way to the Grasmere Sai ashram to find out if the news was really true. Three of us got down on our knees in front of the original shrine in the small prayer room and we prayed, begged, and pleaded for the news not to be true. How do we go on without our Swami? Is the world going to come to an end, now that God has left this earth?

Then… we heard it… that familiar sound… like thunder. We looked up. Our breath suspended. Moments before, tears had been raining down our faces. Now, glorious and wonderous sweets began to rain down upon us, out of thin air. Cachous and candy coated peanuts of various colours, as well as sugar candy, the size of hailstones! They caused such a ruckus as they landed on the brass trays and all over the floors, that those who were at the ashram at the back of the house came running to see. In the end, the floor was covered with magical sweets from the Sai Dimension! We felt so blessed, but we were not the only ones. During the course of that day, Swami showered sweets several times to console and comfort the many others who arrived feeling the same anguish.

This was Swami's divine assurance that He hadn't left us.
He may have left His Physical Body, but He was still very much with us.

"Whenever and wherever my devotees call Me, I will be Present".
My faith in that divine utterance, has since grown leaps and bounds.

Swami is still very much with us.
Anything is possible if we put all our faith in Him.

KRISHNAVELI (COOKIE) GOVENDER, 62
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN

99. THE WORLD IN YOUR EYES

It was a time of deep yearning for me - yearning to be in the closest proximity possible to His Divine Presence. And then the opportunity presented itself – an invitation to attend the World Youth Conference 2007. I was elated. I clearly remember how the excitement began to build up within me, right up to the time when I would be face to face with my Beloved.

Each day, I longed, from the bottom of my heart, to have some direct experience with Bhagawan. I truly believe that when our connection is heart-to-heart, Swami's manifestation is instant. But it's our faith and belief that holds us back.

Finally, one day during the Conference, I was blessed to receive darshan from the front row. I waited… my heart thumping loudly…. hoping…. for that Connection. I watched as He approached slowly. Then, with joy building, Swami was right in front of me. He stared into my eyes, creating a connection so instantaneous and powerful, it is hard to describe.

In His Radiant Eyes, I could see the entire cosmos, expanding and rotating. I travelled into a dimension beyond my understanding. A journey which felt like an hour, even though I know it was only a mere few seconds. With hindsight, I can possibly describe the experience as being a tiny fraction of the one described in the Gita when Arjuna had the grace to see the entire Creation in Lord Krishna's mouth.

It was a moment that took my breath away.
A moment that I carry with me, through every struggle and challenge in my life.

It is that experience which continues to this day to provide me comfort. I just need to say His Name and I feel His Presence right beside me. One powerful moment with the Divine was all I needed to carry me through. And it is one that I will treasure for a lifetime.

REYESA PILLAI, 41
OVERPORT, DURBAN

100. MORE THAN EVER

I have always been committed to Sanathana Dharma. In fact, my family and I have dedicated our lives to preserving the values and traditions of our Hindu religion. Over the years, this pursuit has exposed me to many great Swamis and religious elders, many of whom I have had the good fortune of hosting in my home. So when I heard about Sai Baba in the late 80's, I regarded Him as no more than another revered spiritual Guru.

However, I must admit that I felt an inexplicable connection to Sai Baba, a connection that drew its strength from the regular dreams that I would have of Him. Even though I did not consider myself a devotee (I did not even have a picture of Sai Baba in our home), I would often find myself 'talking' to Him.

Then, in the year 2000, the pull began… I was routinely fasting for Krishna Janmasthami, and I found myself simply continuing the fast. (It's been a fast that has now lasted 25 years!) In December that year, our family embarked on a 6-week holiday to the Far East. With my only knowledge being that Sai Baba lived somewhere in the vicinity of Bangalore, I intentionally included a one-week stay in Bangalore, with the hope of somehow getting to see Him.

Upon our arrival, we were collected by our friend the Chief Justice of Karnataka, who with typical Indian hospitality, insisted that we stay with his family. As soon as we agreed, his next question floored me: *"Would you like to see Baba?"* he asked. When we had hosted the Chief Justice back in South Africa a few years earlier, I had no indication that he was a Sai devotee. *"Yes, most definitely,"* I replied, trying to contain my excitement, as no one in my family knew of the attraction I was beginning to feel towards Baba. As fate would have it, Baba was in Whitefield, a place I had never heard of before, but towards which we set out early the next morning on 20 December 2000. It was to be a date I would never forget.

A friend had provided me with some sage advice when I told him, before our departure, that I would be trying to see Sai Baba. *"Go with no expectations,"* he'd said. As my eyes fell on the huge crowds that had converged in Whitefield, and as I found our family being separated into the male and female queues, I tried hard to practice this guidance – no expectations.

Just then a sevadal beckoned to the Chief Justice's wife, whom we referred to as Ma-ji, to follow her into the hall. Ma-ji drew us along with her, and before I knew it, I was sitting right behind her in the second row, right in front of Swami's dais, with both my young daughters beside me. Even though I did not know much about the ashram protocols, it was clear to me that we were very fortunate indeed. But then the wait began. We waited and waited… no sign of Baba. People began to get up and leave. Still no sign of Baba. I started to chat to the lady next to me, who notably was holding a bundle of letters. I asked her if she could spare a sheet of paper

and a pen, which she kindly did. And that is how I endured the wait – by pouring out the contents of my heart. All the pain and sadness I had felt, especially in my earlier years, found expression on that page. When my heart was emptied, I folded the paper, and without an envelope, marked on top of it: *"My Beloved Bhagawan Baba."*

Two hours later, Swami emerged in bright orange from the rear, and floated towards the mens' side of the hall. Another hour passed. Finally, He began to approach us. And then, before I could blink, He was standing in front of Ma-ji. I held my letter out to Him. He reached out for it, looking directly into my eyes. I looked into His Eyes. And internally, we spoke.
"You finally came!"
"Yes Swami. Do You know me?"
"Of course, I know you."
By now the tears were streaming down my face.
That conversation we shared, was ours, and ours alone. And it was enough…. Enough to last me a lifetime. I returned home a devotee of Bhagawan Baba.

Since that eventful trip, when even my children got severely ill and were in need of hospitalization, my faith in Him has been unwavering. He has guided my every step, even to the point of instructing me to sing bhajans. In a dream, He said:
"I want you to sing."
"But Swami I don't know how. I don't know the words."
"You sing. I will understand," He said.
And that is how we began to have weekly satsang at our home with all our family members in Duffs Road, before we eventually moved to Durban North and joined the local Sai centre.

Through the years, my love for Swami has only grown stronger. So it completely confounded me when Swami took Maha Samadhi, that I felt almost nothing. When everyone around me was devastated, I was emotionless. I tried to cry, but couldn't shed a tear. Some family members rushed immediately to Puttaparthi to attend the funeral proceedings, and even though I wanted to go with them, business and family commitments made it impossible for me to travel. This made me feel even worse - perhaps I was not a true devotee?

Then, in the same week of the funeral, I had the most indescribably beautiful dream: Swami was lying down in the Sai Kulwant Hall. I was distractedly looking for my accommodation. But He called me over to Him. And we spoke for what felt like ages. To the point that I said to Him:
"Swami, there are other people waiting to speak to you."
"Ok. But don't you want to take a photo with me?"
"Yes Swami!"
As He was lying down, I had to put my head down low to be next to His. And then my niece took the photo.
"Now can I go Swami?" I asked. He nodded, and so I trotted off to find my room together with my niece. Upon returning, Swami was still lying in the Kulwant Hall, and He called me once again. This time however, Swami stood up. He held my face in both His Hands, before kissing my forehead, and saying:
"I love you now, more than ever before."
With that, we hugged, and He let me go.

There was my answer. The reason I could not cry…
Because Swami had not left us at all.
Because Swami loves us now, more than ever before!

MEENA ROOPLAL, 60
DURBAN NORTH

Dear Loved One

... everything you see, hear, smell or touch belongs to Me. So how can you give to Me what I already am, but your love?
And that I gave to you before time began as your sole possession.
When you return it to Me, then will I know you are truly Mine and I will dissolve your sorrow and happiness into Me.
That, being Me, I will place you in bliss forever.
For I love and think of you constantly.

From your most loving Father[48]

THE ARTHI

My Beloved Swami

May the camphor of my life
Burn brightly
Tracing You
Illuminating You.

May every wave of light
Sear through darkness.
And every waft of smoke
Soak through attachment.

Then, with nothing left
But memories that evanesce,
And a name that fades.
Swami, please carry me back home

To You.

Image A (Story #2)

The lingam discovered in a birthday cake.

Image B (Story #2)

The paper mache lamp lit by Swami.

Image C (Story #2)

The padukas upon which Swami put his lotus feet.

Image D (Story #2)

Swami's silver Toyota, after the complete auto valet service.

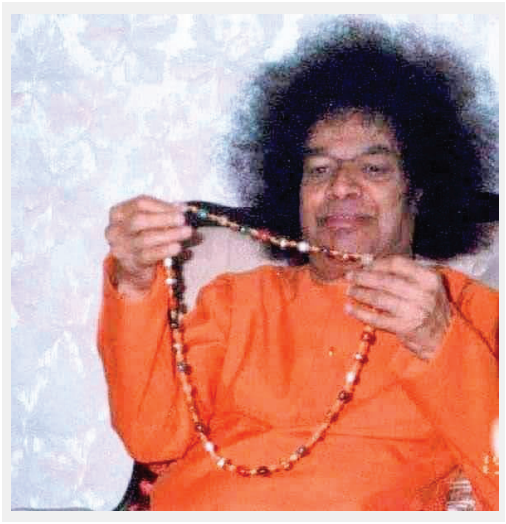


Image E (Story #4)

The string of multicoloured pearls identical to the one lost.

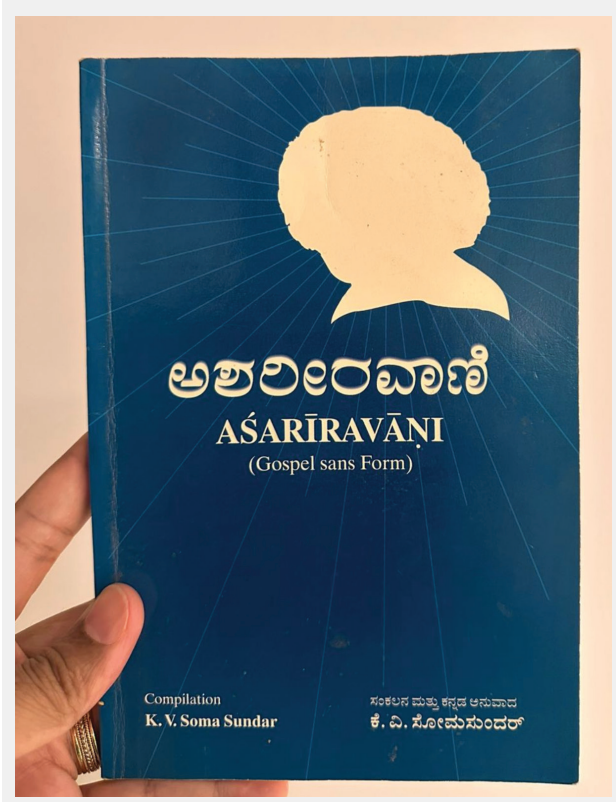
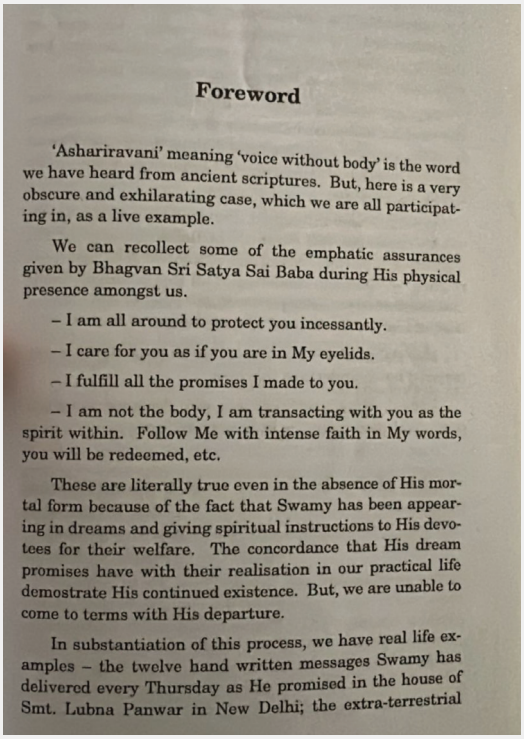


Image F (Story #12)

The book given by a ‘stranger’.



Foreword

'Ashariravani' meaning 'voice without body' is the word we have heard from ancient scriptures. But, here is a very obscure and exhilarating case, which we are all participating in, as a live example.

We can recollect some of the emphatic assurances given by Bhagvan Sri Satya Sai Baba during His physical presence amongst us.

– I am all around to protect you incessantly.

– I care for you as if you are in My eyelids.

– I fulfill all the promises I made to you.

– I am not the body, I am transacting with you as the spirit within. Follow Me with intense faith in My words, you will be redeemed, etc.

These are literally true even in the absence of His mortal form because of the fact that Swamy has been appearing in dreams and giving spiritual instructions to His devotees for their welfare. The concordance that His dream promises have with their realisation in our practical life demostrate His continued existence. But, we are unable to come to terms with His departure.

In substantiation of this process, we have real life examples – the twelve hand written messages Swamy has delivered every Thursday as He promised in the house of Smt. Lubna Panwar in New Delhi; the extra-terrestrial

Image G (Story #12)

Entitled 'voice without body'

Image H (Story #13)

Feeling his love up close.

Image I (Story #40)

A moment captured in time.

Image J (Story #42)

The heavy engraved ring found in a wrapped parcel of soil from Prashanthi Nilayam.

Image K (Story #42)

Still fitting after all these years.

Image l (Story #48)

The little black lingam found in a birthday cake and upon which the Shiva Namo appeared.

Image M (Story # 57)

The late Sheila & Muthu Krishna Poonen with Swami in 1993.

Image N (Story #61)

The mysterious moonstone crystal gift.

Image O (Story #61)

The lingam materialized by Swami in Kashmir

Image P (Story #85)

At the Sathyamma Temple beside the beautiful white deity of Mother Sathyabhama.

Image Q (Story #91)

The rare photo of Shirdi Sai Baba.

Image R (Story #94)

The materialised photo of Jesus and Swami.

GRATITUDE

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people:

Firstly, to all the Contributors of our 100 stories, and their families - thank you for the trust you placed in me. Yes, we were all merely His instruments in this 100th year commemoration, but as Swami says, we are not 'jada' or inert. Each of you used your power of discrimination, and in choosing to let down your armour, expose your hearts, invest your time, and share your stories, you chose the path of Love and Courage. This book exists because of all of you.

Preshan Ramdutt and the entire team from Art Printers – thank you for your support and your expertise. You helped us turn nebulous ideas into a beautiful product crafted with love.

Sharoona Sewnarain – thank you for your large and generous heart. Without hesitation, you lifted a mighty weight off my shoulders, for which I will forever be indebted.

Sureka Singh – thank you for the sensitive and thoughtful care you put into proofreading the manuscript. I could not have asked for a more loving set of eyes.

Pranav Tulsiram and Keeren Govender – thank you for the special cover design and for the meticulous layout and typesetting. Not to mention your unruffled patience in putting up with my endless late-night requests.

Rayven, Karmishta and Trilokesh - my blessings from Swami - thank you for being my constant cheerleaders and my insightful team of diverse perspective shifters. Your quiet acceptance of my heightened distraction levels as I increasingly immersed myself in gathering and capturing the stories of our Lord, was deeply valued. I love you googol.

And finally, my Beloved Swami – thank You for bringing all these people into my life, to help me grow closer to You. May we all fulfil our life's Divine Purpose.

GLOSSARY

Aarthi / Arthi	A Hindu ritual of light, where lamps, typically camphor or wicks soaked in ghee, are waved before a deity in worship and as an expression of devotion, love, and gratitude.
Abhaya Hasta	A hand gesture symbolizing protection, reassurance, divine grace, and fearlessness. It is often seen with the palm facing outward and fingers extended upwards.
Abhishekam	A ritual ceremony where a deity's idol is bathed with various sacred substances such as water, milk, yogurt, ghee and honey, accompanied by the chanting of mantras.
Agarbathi	Incense used in prayer and religious ceremonies. The aromatic smoke is believed to carry prayers to the divine realm as well as to calm the mind and nervous system in preparation for meditation.
Ahimsa	Non-violence
Akshaya	Eternal, imperishable, never diminishing.
Aradhana Day	Observed on 24 April every year as the day Sathya Sai Baba transitioned from the physical form to the eternal cosmic form.
Atma Lingam	"Atma" means soul or self, and "lingam" is a symbolic representation of Lord Shiva. Therefore, Atma Lingam signifies the soul of Shiva or the essence of His Divine Power.
Avatar	Incarnation of God
Aya	Colloquial Tamil for grandmother
Balvikas	A Sanskrit term translating to the "blossoming of the child". The name of the programme founded by Sri Sathya Sai Baba to foster character development and spiritual transformation in children.
Bharatanatyam	A classical dance form of southern India.
Bhai	(Hindi) Brother
Bhajans	Devotional songs in Hinduism that express love to a deity. An important part of Bhakti Yoga, which is the path of connecting with God through devotion.
Bhakti	Devotional worship directed to the Supreme usually in the form of a deity or incarnation.
Darshan	The auspicious sight of a deity or holy being.

Dasara	A Hindu festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil, and which marks the end of the nine-day Navaratri festival, dedicated to God as the Divine Mother or Feminine Energy.
Dharma	Righteousness, right conduct
Dhoti	An ankle-length breechcloth, wrapped around the waist and the legs, resembling the shape of trousers.
Gayatri Mantra	One of the oldest and most powerful Vedic mantras as per Hindu religious beliefs. According to Sai Baba, the Gayatri is a universal prayer representing the essence of the Vedas. It is a complete prayer for protection, nourishment, illumination and, finally liberation.
Guru Purnima	A day for expressing gratitude to one's spiritual teachers for guiding people towards enlightenment, and for reflection on the teachings received.
Hanuman Chalisa	A devotional hymn chanted by millions of Hindus in praise of Hanuman who is considered to be the embodiment of faith, surrender and devotion. It is in an Awadhi language and is attributed to Tulsidas.
Hiranyagarbha Lingam	Sathya Sai Baba brought forth the Hiranyagarbha Lingam through His mouth on 15 February 1999. It is a multifaceted symbol representing the origin of the universe, Divine Love, and the boundless nature of God.
Hrudaya Nivasi	A Sanskrit term which translates to 'Indweller of the Heart'. It refers to a divine being who resides within the hearts of all living beings.
Hurdee	(Hindi) Turmeric.
Japa	A form of meditation where a mantra or sacred word is repeated, either aloud or internally, to focus the mind and cultivate spiritual awareness. Often involves a rosary (japamala) for counting.
Jivan-mukta	Self-realised one.
Kafni	A simple, often unstitched, garment worn by ascetics or holy men. Essentially a long, loose-fitting shirt or robe, sometimes part of a shroud.
Kali Yuga	The fourth and final age in the Hindu cycle of cosmic ages, regarded as the "Age of Darkness," marked by widespread conflict, hypocrisy, and a decline in human intellect, morality, and spirituality.
Kalpavriksha Tree	A wish-fulfilling divine tree of mythological origin believed to grant any desire to those who approach it with pure intentions.

Karma	A complex principle from both Hinduism and Buddhism where actions and their intentions influence a person's future, including the next life, through cycles of rebirth. More than the simple pop culture understanding where karma is a divine force that punishes and rewards, it is a universal process of learning and soul evolution.
Kumkum	A ceremonial red powder used in Hinduism for religious and social observances, representing Shakti, the primordial feminine energy. Also known as Sindoor, or vermilion powder.
Leela	Divine play or sport. Signifies the universe as a joyful, playful creation of God.
Mahasamadhi	The conscious and voluntary departure from the physical body, often associated with yogis and enlightened beings. It is a final, wilful act of dissolving the connection with the body, and entering the state of liberation.
Mandir	A temple or spiritual place for Hindus.
Manja	(Tamil) Yellow. Sometimes used to refer to the spice turmeric known for its bright yellow colour.
Mata Pita Guru Daivam	The Sanskrit phrase "Mother, Father, Teacher, God" which emphasizes the importance due to these four entities in one's life. It highlights the order of respect, starting with the mother who nurtures and sustains, followed by the father who guides and provides, then the teacher who imparts knowledge, and finally, God, representing the divine or ultimate truth.
Mukti	Concept of spiritual liberation, otherwise known as moksha or nirvana, in Indian religion. The state where one escapes the cycle of birth and rebirth.
Murti	A devotional image, such as a statue or icon, of a deity or saint used during prayer or worship at Hindu temples or shrines.
Narayana seva	Translates to "Service to humanity is service to God". Narayana Seva goes beyond mere charity offered to the poor and hungry; it is about recognizing the divine (Narayana) in everyone and offering service as an act of love and gratitude.
Navagraha	Refers to the nine celestial bodies considered influential in astrology. These are regarded not just as astronomical entities but also deities capable of impacting individuals' destinies and karma.
Nirvana	From Buddhism, meaning a perfect peace and happiness, like heaven. The highest state of enlightenment.

Omkar	In Prashanthi Nilayam, devotees chant the 'Om' 21 times every dawn as a means of purification and preparation for ultimate merger with the Divine.
Paan	A leaf package otherwise known as a betel quid or betel nut chew which is used as a stimulant. It may contain tobacco and other additives such as cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, aniseed, coconut, sugar, syrups and fruit extracts, to enhance the flavour.
Pada Namaskar	Touching of the feet, considered an act of respect or reverence.
Padukas	Type of traditional Indian footwear consisting of a sole with a knob between the big and second toes.
Pagal	(Hindi, Urdu) Generally translates to 'crazy' or 'mad'.
PBUH	The initialization of 'Peace Be Upon Him' - an honorific phrase used after any mention in speech or print of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.
Prasad/ Prasadam	Vegetarian food or other items that have been offered to a deity or spiritual leader and then given back to devotees as a blessing. This act of offering and receiving prasadam is seen as a way to connect with the divine.
Prashanthi Nilayam	Name of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's main ashram in Puttaparthi, India. Means the 'abode of supreme peace'.
Prema	Love or Divine, Transcendent Love.
Poorna Avatar	A full incarnation considered to be a complete manifestation of God, not a partial expression of the power and glory of God.
Punjabi	A Punjabi dress or suit, also known as a Salwar Kameez, is the traditional attire of women in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. It typically consists of a long, loose-fitting shirt, trousers, and a long scarf.
Purtassi	A Hindu festival and fasting period dedicated to Lord Venkateswara. It is observed annually from mid-September to mid-October as a time for devotees to cleanse their minds and bodies through fasting, prayer, and self-discipline.
Roht	A sweet, doughnut like cake that is about the size of a saucer and generally only made as a prayer offering or prasad.
Rudram	Powerful vedic hymn recited in honour of Rudra, the Hindu deity associated with Lord Shiva.
Sadhaka	Dedicated spiritual practitioner

Sadhana	Disciplined and dedicated practice or learning, especially in religion or music.
Samsara	Concept found in many eastern religions. Regarded as the cycle of death and rebirth to which life in the material world is bound.
Sannidhi	Means nearness, presence, or a holy, sacred place.
Samagri	Materials for prayer often comprising a mixture of various herbs, roots, and other natural ingredients that are used as offerings into a sacred fire.
Sarva Dharma	All dharmas or all religions. As the logo of the Sai organization, it signifies the concept of the unity of all faiths, or the idea that different religions are different paths leading to the same ultimate truth or goal.
Sathya	Truth
Satsang	A sacred gathering. From the Sanskrit 'satsanga' meaning the association of Truth.
Sevadals	(Sanskrit) Volunteer
Shanthi	Peace
Shakthi	Power, energy, or force.
Shiva lingam	Linga means a "mark" or a symbol, thus the Shiva Linga is a symbol of Lord Shiva - reminding the devotee of the Formless, Omnipotent Lord. It serves as a powerful representation of the universe's fundamental principles —creation, preservation, and dissolution.
Shivarathri / Maha Shivarathri	Shivarathri lmeans the great night of Shiva. It falls just before the new moon every month. Mahashivarathri is observed annually as the most spiritually significant festival dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. It is observed as a night during which a spiritual seeker can conquer the darkness of ignorance and achieve the light of knowledge and spiritual awakening.
Shiva Namam/ Namo	Also known as Tripundra, it is a sacred mark typically consisting of three horizontal lines made with sacred ash, often with a dot or bindu. The three lines represent Shiva's three fundamental aspects: creation, preservation, and destruction (or transformation), or the three gunas (qualities) of nature: satwa, rajas, and tamas.
Skanda Shasti Kavasam	A devotional song composed in Tamil on Lord Muruga in the 19th century. It is believed to provide protection from negative forces, diseases or accidents.

Suprabhatam	Refers to the prayer sung at dawn in praise of the Lord to awaken the divinity present within each one. It is the act of dedicating oneself to the Lord and praying for His blessings right at the start of a new day.
Surya Namaskar	Salutations to the sun, through a sequence of yoga poses, typically involving 12 asanas and mantras, performed in a dynamic and flowing manner. It is a way to greet and honor the sun, recognizing its role as a source of energy and life.
Swami	Honorific title given to a Hindu male religious teacher. Comes from the Sanskrit 'swa' for self. He who is one with his Self.
Thaalam	(Tamil) Also known as Manjeera. Small brass hand cymbals used to keep rhythm in traditional Indian music.
Tabla	A pair of hand drums used primarily in Indian classical music.
Thali	A sacred necklace worn by married women, symbolizing marital status and the bond between the couple. With variations in design, it is also known as a mangalsutra.
Thappu	(Telugu) Refers to a wrong action, error or mistake.
Tryambakam mantra	Also known as the Mahamrityunjaya or Rudra mantra, it is a verse of the Rigveda addressed to Tryambaka, "The Three-eyed One", an epithet of Rudra who is identified with Lord Shiva.
Ubuntu	(Zulu) Rooted in humanist African philosophy, roughly translated as "humanity to others", or "I am because we are".
Vibuthi	Sacred ash materialized and distributed by Sai Baba to devotees as a blessing and a means to address various problems. It is believed to have both physical and spiritual significance, symbolizing the impermanence of the body and the transformative power of faith.
Yajna / Yagna	Also known as hawan, or a fire ritual, involving sacred offerings and mantras as an act of sacrifice, devotion or worship.

REFERENCES

[1] My Baba and I, John Hislop, p.170

[2] Extract from a letter written on 24 Jul 1971, Prema Dhaara 3, p120

[3] Undated letter to the teachers and boys of Sri Sathya Sai Hostel, Brindavan. https://www.sathyasai.org/bhagwan-sri-sathya-sai-baba/letters/students-professors

[4] Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 28, Disc. 22, 23 August 1995

[5] Power of the Gayathri Mantra is beyond imagining, 29 Jan 2018 - https://aravindb1982.blogspot.com/search/label/Air%20India%20Kanishka

[6] Extract from letter written on 13 Mar 1980, Prema Dhaara 2, p130

[7] Blessings to a married couple, undated, Prema Dhaara 2, p165

[8] Extract from a poem written by Baba, Prema Dhaara 1, p32-33

[9] Extract from a letter written on 16 Dec 1973, Prema Dhaara 3, p158

[10] An undated poem written by Baba, Prema Dhaara 1, p9

[11] Sathya Sai Speaks, 5 October 1967

[12] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p107

[13] Extract from a letter written on 30 Sept 1980, Prema Dhaara 2, p136

[14] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p106

[15] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p 94

[16] Sathya Sai Speaks, 5 October 1967

[17] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p39

[18] Extract from the Prayer of Surrender, source unknown, but attributed to Sathya Sai Baba, https://www.sathyasai.org/devotion/prayers/surrender.html

[19] Undated letter, Prema Dhaara 3, p178

[20] Extract from a letter written to Hislop in 1971, Prema Dhaara 3, p125

[21] Extract from letter written on 24 Mar 1971, Prema Dhaara 3 p155

[22] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p44-45

[23] Extract from letter written on 16 Jul 1965, Prema Dhaara 3 p66

[24] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p49

[25] Undated extract from a letter, Prema Dhaara 3, p217

[26] Extract from a letter written on 24 Mar 1971, Prema Dhaara 3, p155

[27] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p39

[28] Undated extract from a letter, Prema Dhaara 2, p167

[29] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p52

[30] Undated letter to a devotee on his birthday, Prema Dhaara 2, p168

[31] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p64

[32] Extract from a letter written on 24 Jul 1971, Prema Dhaara 3, p120

[33] Extract from the Sri Sathya Sai Chalisa by Seema. M. Dewan

[34] Extract from Christmas Message, 1978, Prema Dhaara 1, p56-58

[35] Extract from a letter written on 4 May 1973, Prema Dhaara 3, p167

[36] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p18

[37] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p106

[38] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p23

[39] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p93

[40] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p93

[41] Extract from an undated letter to Hislop, https://www.sathyasai.org/bhagwan-sri-sathya-sai-baba/letters/hislop

[42] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p98

[43] Extract from an undated letter to His students, Prema Dhaara 3, p3

[44] Extract from an undated letter, Prema Dhaara 3, p217

[45] Extract from an undated letter to His students, Prema Dhaara 3, p3

[46] When you said YES to me https://braahman.org/sai-baba

[47] Garland of 108 Precious Gems, Prof N Kasturi, p47

[48]Extract from an undated poem How Will You Know, Prema Dhaara 1, p2-4